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FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN: REVIEW OF MAINSTREAMING IN THE ORGANIZATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

Progress achieved in the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and in mainstreaming a gender perspective within the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1996/6 on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, established the work programme of the Commission on the Status of Women, in particular the items to be included on the agenda of the Commission. As regards documentation for the sessions of the Commission, the Council decided, inter alia, that under item 3 (a) of the Commission's agenda a report of the Secretary-General on the measures taken and progress achieved in mainstreaming a gender perspective within the United Nations system should be prepared on an annual basis.

2. Reporting requirements contained in General Assembly resolutions 50/203 and 51/69 request the Secretary-General to report annually to the Assembly, through the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council, on ways to enhance the capacity of the Organization and of the United Nations system to support the ongoing follow-up to the Conference in the most integrated and effective way, including human and financial requirements.

3. The present report has been prepared in response to those two mandates. Given the need for integrated reporting, mandates contained in Commission resolution 39/5 on the preparation of a joint work plan between the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Centre for Human Rights of the United Nations Secretariat are reflected in section I of the present report. Section II of the report fulfils the reporting requirements of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/5 on Palestinian women and Commission resolution 40/1 on the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts and imprisoned.

4. The Secretary-General, in his report on the implementation of the outcome of the Conference (A/51/322), noted the understanding of the Secretariat that the report requested in General Assembly resolution 50/203 would be provided on a rolling basis. While briefly summarizing results from previous intergovernmental meetings, new material would be added to each report. Therefore, the three separate reports to be submitted in the course of a year to the three-tiered intergovernmental mechanism under the broader heading of follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and mainstreaming of a gender perspective would be self-standing. The complete picture of relevant intergovernmental, national-level and United Nations system activities taking place over a year, however, can be obtained only by consulting all three reports.

5. A particular effort was to be made in those reports to provide information that was most pertinent to the respective intergovernmental body in order to facilitate intergovernmental decision-making. Thus, the reports to the Commission on the Status of Women would emphasize efforts undertaken by the secretariat of the Commission in support of mainstreaming a gender perspective and other follow-up activities. They would also cover inter-agency activities and provide an overview of national action and action by civil society. Bearing in mind the need for integrated reporting, information requested under long-standing mandates or particular resolutions would be incorporated into those reports.

6. The emphasis of the reports to the Economic and Social Council would be on facilitating the coordination function of the Council. Thus, they would focus on activities in the area of the advancement of women and gender mainstreaming by other bodies reporting to the Council, as well as at the inter-agency level, with a view to supporting the Council's responsibilities in system-wide coordination in mainstreaming of a gender perspective, a task requiring the Council's ongoing and long-term attention. The Commission secretariat is assessing opportunities for including an annual thematic focus as well into the reports to the Council in order to increase their overall usefulness for intergovernmental decision-making.

7. It is intended that the reports to the Assembly should contain information from all intergovernmental bodies and United Nations system entities not reporting to the Council, including information from specialized agencies and international financial institutions. An analysis of activities undertaken at the national level by non-governmental organizations and civil society would also be provided. The reports would contain a section on means of implementation at all levels, including human and resource needs. To the extent possible and practical, reports required under specific resolutions would also be included.

I. PROGRESS IN THE FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN AND IN MAINSTREAMING A GENDER PERSPECTIVE WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

A. General Assembly and Economic and Social Council

1. Results of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly

8. The report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/51/322) contained a section on mainstreaming a gender perspective. The report outlined the implications of gender factors for research, analysis, programme and policy development, and decision-making, and proposed a series of steps to mainstream a gender perspective. Noting that considerable experience already existed in certain areas of United Nations system activities, the report concluded that further steps were necessary to strengthen the conceptual basis for the system-wide mainstreaming of a gender perspective and its practical implications and requirements.

9. The report was in general favourably received, and the Secretary-General was invited to focus on the practical implications of mainstreaming a gender perspective. Accordingly, in its resolution 51/69 of 12 December 1996, the General Assembly made a number of references to mainstreaming by different actors, including by States and the United Nations system, and in different areas, including the human rights of women. In particular, the Assembly welcomed the contribution of the report of the Secretary-General to translating the concept of mainstreaming into practical action, including the ongoing work to develop methodologies to facilitate the application of a gender perspective into all policies and programmes throughout the United Nations system.

2. Substantive session of 1997 of the Economic and Social Council: coordination segment

10. In General Assembly resolution 50/203, the Economic and Social Council was invited to devote one high-level segment, one coordination segment and one operational activities segment to the advancement of women and the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Accordingly, in its decision 1996/310, the Council decided to consider, at its coordination segment in 1997, the cross-sectoral theme "Mainstreaming of gender perspectives into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system".

11. In anticipation of that decision, the first steps for preparing the report of the Secretary-General on the issue were taken at the first session of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality (New York, 22 and 23 October 1996). A background paper on mainstreaming and coordination, prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), served as the basis for discussion. The Committee agreed on the need to further clarify the system-wide implications for mainstreaming.

12. The preliminary outline of the report of the Secretary-General for the coordination segment of the Council's substantive session of 1997 covers:

(a) Clarification of the concept of mainstreaming a gender perspective: qualitative change from Nairobi to Beijing;

(b) Concise overview of intergovernmental actions taken since the Fourth World Conference on Women to mainstream a system-wide gender perspective: towards a comprehensive approach to mainstreaming a gender perspective at the intergovernmental level;

(c) Institutional requirements for mainstreaming a gender perspective, including policies, institutional cultures, incentive systems, operating procedures and gender training:

(i) At the intra-institutional level: administrative instructions, programme budgets, gender training etc.;

(ii) At the ad hoc inter-institutional level: parameters for lessons learned;

(iii) In the integrated follow-up to all United Nations conferences;

(iv) At the formal inter-agency level, in particular through the ACC Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality;

(e) Resource allocation for mainstreaming: the need for a common base for the quantification of financial allocations;

(f) Assessment and proposals for further action.

13. The Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) Women in Development (WID) Subgroup is preparing three discussion papers for the second session of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality, covering three aspects of mainstreaming: indicators, parameters for evaluating best practices, and policy enforcement and accountability. All entities of the United Nations system were invited to contribute to the preparation of those papers; together with a background paper on mainstreaming and coordination and additional information on specific questions that is being gathered in accordance with the preliminary outline given above, those papers will form the analytical core of the above-mentioned report.

14. A preliminary draft of the report will be reviewed at the second session of the Committee, in March 1997, and guidance is expected for the finalization of the report.

15. Any comments that the Commission as a whole or individual members in their statements may make on the issue of mainstreaming would provide valuable input into the preparations of the report for the Economic and Social Council.

B. Activities in support of mainstreaming a gender perspective into the work of the United Nations system

16. Since the fortieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, steps taken in support of implementation of the Platform for Action included a number of initiatives undertaken by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat in support of mainstreaming a gender perspective.

17. Following the endorsement by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1996/34 of 25 July 1996, of the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001, the Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development and the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat informed United Nations entities of the endorsement, in particular the comments made on the plan by the Commission on the Status of Women in its resolution 40/10 and the annex thereto, and the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC). It will be recalled that the Commission had commented, inter alia, that the United Nations Secretariat as a whole should undertake activities in the critical areas of concern, and it identified a number of Secretariat entities not included in the activities reflected in the plan.[1] CPC agreed to ensure, in its examination of the plan for the period 1998-2001, that the mainstreaming of a gender perspective was reflected in its individual programmes.

18. The above-mentioned communication by the Department/Division to the United Nations entities noted that the comments of the Commission required careful consideration, and would need to be clearly accounted for in the comprehensive mid-term review of the plan in 1998. It was noted that the Secretary-General had been requested to ensure the mainstreaming of a system-wide gender perspective in all United Nations activities, including in decision-making as part of the accountability of senior managers. The need for ongoing support and commitment to that task was emphasized.

19. In order to support efforts by a number of entities to mainstream a gender perspective, the Division for the Advancement of Women initiated a series of meetings with the Office of Legal Affairs, the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the United Nations Secretariat. During those meetings, the concept and practical implications of mainstreaming were discussed. Possible areas were identified within the work programmes of those departments that would seem to lend themselves most readily to mainstreaming efforts, including in their proposed programme budget for 1998-1999.

20. The Department of Political Affairs subsequently identified a number of steps that could be taken to ensure participation in the implementation of the Platform for Action, and to promote mainstreaming within the Department's areas of responsibilities, including the organization, in collaboration with the Division for the Advancement of Women, of workshops and seminars for its staff members. Existing collaboration between the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs on compilation of data disaggregated by sex and gender impact assessments is being strengthened.

21. At the invitation of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, senior staff of that Department were briefed by the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women on the requirements for mainstreaming. Although difficulties were acknowledged in achieving certain goals, in particular the numerical goals of gender balance in peacekeeping missions, the importance of pursuing mainstreaming in the programmatic and policy orientations of the Department and its operations was emphasized. In a preliminary manner, ideas for conducting an analysis of one or several existing peacekeeping operations from a gender perspective were discussed with a view to developing a framework for mainstreaming in the operations of that Department.

22. There has been a noticeable increase in the number of requests to provide input and comments from a gender perspective to reports from different departments of the United Nations Secretariat, including the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development. Notably, the Division contributed to the Department's work in the area of poverty eradication, and is supporting preparations for the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the special session of the General Assembly to review and appraise the implementation of Agenda 21 in order to integrate a gender perspective into those processes.

23. Similarly, in preparation for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), a paper on gender aspects of Habitat II was prepared by the Division, which was made available at the Conference; the paper addressed the incorporation of the results of the Fourth World Conference on Women into the Habitat Agenda. The Division remains actively involved in the follow-up to Habitat II, with a special focus on mainstreaming. A paper was prepared for the World Food Summit, focusing on the gender aspects of land ownership.

24. Among activities jointly executed by several entities, cooperation continued among the Division for the Advancement of Women, UNIFEM and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women

(INSTRAW) in the development of WomenWatch, a United Nations Internet site on the advancement and empowerment of women. The site will facilitate global information exchange for monitoring the implementation of the Platform for Action through the use of computer networking technology. It is expected to be launched in March 1997, and will be accessible via the World Wide Web, a gopher site and electronic mail. Although partial funding from extrabudgetary resources has been allocated, additional resources will be needed to implement the project. Phase one of the project will ink the Web pages of the Division for the Advancement of Women, UNIFEM and INSTRAW. It will contain archival information on the Fourth World Conference on Women and other recent global United Nations conferences, providing a single on-line source for key information and data on global women's issues, and will be linked with other relevant sites on the Internet. In a later phase, it is hoped that non-governmental organizations and other United Nations entities will become active partners in the expansion of WomenWatch. A training component is included in the project. In that regard, a seminar on information technology was held in January 1997 in Peru. Training on the use of electronic networking technology, which was provided by the Division at that seminar on a pilot basis, will be developed for use elsewhere.

C. ACC Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality

25. Following the decision of ACC, at its first regular session of 1996 (Nairobi, 28 and 29 April 1996), to establish the ACC Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality, the first session of the Committee was held on 22 and 23 October 1996 at United Nations Headquarters, New York. It was chaired by the Senior Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues on behalf of the United Nations. The Division for the Advancement of Women serves as the secretariat of the Committee.

26. The Committee's terms of reference, as adopted by ACC, entrust the Committee with cooperation and coordination of United nations system-wide efforts to implement the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, as well as gender-related recommendations emanating from recent United Nations conferences within the purview of the system. The Committee is also entrusted with supporting the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the work of the United Nations system.

27. The Committee is expected to draft an advocacy or mission statement for the United Nations system on the advancement and empowerment of women and gender mainstreaming, for adoption by ACC. The statement will identify performance indicators, mechanisms for accountability and best practices, and will develop practical tools and approaches for mainstreaming and for monitoring and implementing the Platform for Action and the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001.

28. Following its initial discussion, the Committee noted that mainstreaming was a responsibility of the United Nations system as a whole and of all staff in all policy and programme areas and in decision-making, and that responsibility for mainstreaming started at the highest level. The Committee agreed that it would follow carefully and would monitor regularly progress made throughout the

United Nations system in incorporating a gender perspective in institutional structures, and in policies and programming. It also emphasized the need for the inter-agency task forces set up by ACC for integrated Conference follow-up to fully reflect a gender perspective in their work, including at the country level. It called on ACC to underline the importance of integrating a gender perspective in the work of the task forces and in subsequent activities on integrated follow-up to global conferences. Mainstreaming will be an ongoing concern of the Committee.

29. The Committee put in place a short-term and a long-term programme of work. Among the short-term areas of work are the following: interaction with ACC inter-agency task forces on conference follow-up; indicators, evaluation of best practices, and accountability; and gender balance in the United Nations system. Among the long-term areas of work are: indicators; interaction with ACC machinery; and issue-specific concerns. For example, the Committee decided to review the issues of women in the peace process, women in conflict resolution and violence against women in March 1997. At subsequent sessions, it will discuss gender training and the implementation of the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001, among other issues.

30. The second session of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality will take place on 5 and 6 March 1997 in New York. An oral report on the results of that session will be before the Commission.

D. Joint work plan of the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Centre for Human Rights of the United Nations Secretariat

31. In its resolution 39/5, the Commission on the Status of Women requested the Secretary-General to prepare annually a joint work plan for the Centre for Human Rights and the Division for the Advancement of Women, which would help to facilitate the mainstreaming of women's human rights, and to inform the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights of the plan at their annual sessions.

1. Assessment of the implementation of the current work plan

32. In implementing the joint work plan (see E/CN.6/1996/13), the systematic exchange of information between the Division and the Centre, including in meetings between the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women, continued and was expanded in the course of 1996.

33. The Division for the Advancement of Women and the Centre for Human Rights cooperated closely during the first session of the open-ended working group on the elaboration of a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, held during the fortieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 1996. The Centre also provided comments and information for the report of the Secretary-General on a comparative summary of existing communications and inquiry

procedures and practices under international human rights instruments and under the Charter of the United Nations (E/CN.6/1997/4). The Division provided written information on the work undertaken at the first session of the open-ended working group of the Commission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its elaboration of a proposal for an optional protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The Division was represented at the fifteenth session of the Committee during discussion of the draft protocol to the Covenant.

34. In order to strengthen the cooperation and links between the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and other human rights treaty bodies, the exchange of information between the Division and the Centre regarding the work of the human rights treaty bodies serviced by them occurred on a regular basis, and included the provision of information to the experts on the work of other treaty bodies. Regular exchange of calendars of events took place to facilitate that coordination. The Division participated in the seventh meeting of persons chairing human rights treaty bodies in September 1996. It also participated in a meeting convened by the American Association for the Advancement of Science in October 1996, which prepared a background paper concerning the revision of reporting guidelines to ensure greater gender sensitivity in reporting under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. That paper was submitted to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at its fifteenth session in November. The Division provided support to the Chairperson and members of the Committee in attending the joint meeting with the Committee on the Rights of the Child at Cairo in November 1996, and it joined with UNICEF and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in sponsoring a dialogue between the chairpersons of the two Committees on 12 December 1996 at United Nations Headquarters.

35. The Centre made significant inputs into the preparation of a report for the Committee on ways and means, which examines the working methods of various treaty bodies with a view to enhancing the work of the Committee (CEDAW/C/1997/5).

36. The Division provided input into the work of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women contributed a paper to an expert group meeting on violence against women migrant workers, which was held at Manila from 27 to 31 May 1996.

37. The Division for the Advancement of Women has endeavoured to support the integration of a gender perspective into the work of the United Nations system with regard to the human rights dimension of the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS). That work will continue, especially through the Division's participation in the development of human rights guidelines and by encouraging contributions by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS to the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

38. The Division, together with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNFPA, convened the first meeting ever of

members of all human rights treaty bodies to discuss an issue of common concern. The round table, comprising members of treaty bodies and representatives of United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations and held at Glen Cove, New York, from 9 to 11 December 1996, allowed for an exchange of views on human rights approaches to women's health in the work of all human rights treaty bodies, with a focus on reproductive and sexual rights.

39. The Division and the Centre were both represented at a meeting on women's health and reproductive rights (Toronto, 26-29 September 1996), convened by the Commonwealth Medical Association as follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and the International Conference on Population and Development. The meeting provided an opportunity to highlight the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women under article 12 of the Convention.

2. Joint work plan for 1997

40. During 1997, the cooperation between the Division and the Centre on the work of and cooperation among the treaty bodies, the elaboration of optional protocols and special rapporteurs will be further consolidated. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights/Centre for Human Rights and the Division for the Advancement of Women will continue to systematically exchange information about the work of each human rights mechanism for which they provide substantive servicing. Briefing notes will be exchanged, in particular on the outcome of the sessions of treaty bodies. There will also be a number of targeted activities that are expected to support the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all human rights activities implemented by the Centre for Human Rights. Most notably, a joint project on the integration of a gender perspective into technical cooperation practices and procedures will become operational in 1997.

41. The Division will prepare a background paper on the relevance of gender in the enjoyment of rights covered by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as an input to the elaboration of a new general comment on article 3 by the Human Rights Committee for its forthcoming session, in March 1997. It will also provide input to the work on a general comment on the right to health by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and will continue to contribute to the Committee's revision of its reporting guidelines so that they reflect a gender perspective. The Division will provide a selected number of briefs on the status of women in countries whose reports are considered by treaty bodies.

42. The Division will provide information relevant to the elaboration of concluding observations/comments of the other treaty bodies, ensuring that the concluding comments of CEDAW are immediately available to the other treaty bodies, and also that relevant concluding comments are available to thematic and country-specific rapporteurs.

43. The Division will provide the Centre with targeted inputs to the work of the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, which will include the establishment of direct contact with the experts entrusted with the preparation of studies on systematic rape and sexual slavery

during periods of armed conflict, and on human rights and income distribution. The Division will also provide information on the status of women to country-specific rapporteurs. In addition, the High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights and the Division for the Advancement of Women will coordinate their activities and exchange information in connection with the following mandates for which they are respectively responsible: (a) the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on armed conflict and children, and (b) reports on the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts and imprisoned.

44. Cooperation between the Division and the Centre will be expanded and strengthened as they develop and maintain their respective Internet sites. The Centre's Web site already incorporates a number of the reports of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. A link will be established from the Centre's site to the Division's CEDAW site, and vice versa, to provide for fast electronic cross-referencing.

45. The Division will contribute to the implementation of the recommendations of the above-mentioned round table of human rights treaty bodies on human rights approaches to women's health, which was held at Glen Cove in December 1996. One of the priority actions emerging from the round table is the preparation of a resource book on human rights to be used for training staff members of bodies of the United Nations in the field of human rights. It will be prepared jointly by the Division, the Centre for Human Rights and UNFPA.

46. Based on preparatory work that commenced in late 1996, a global project was elaborated and subsequently endorsed by the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights, in November 1996. The project, implementation of which is expected to commence in the first quarter of 1997, aims to facilitate the integration of a gender perspective into all aspects of technical cooperation practices and procedures, from the needs assessment and project formulation phases to monitoring and evaluation. The project will be implemented and funded by the Centre for Human Rights, with the Division contributing gender expertise and advice in the various stages of the project's implementation.

47. In the meantime, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights/Centre for Human Rights will continue to seek the assistance and expertise of the Division for the Advancement of Women for specific technical cooperation initiatives, including, as appropriate, needs assessment and project formulation missions. The Division will also continue to participate in training courses on reporting under human rights treaties organized by the Centre, as well as other ad hoc activities, such as national workshops on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Centre and the Division will also work together to mobilize extrabudgetary resources to permit the organization of similar initiatives, including training courses that seek to sensitize women and men to the rights to which women are entitled under international law.

E. Follow-up by Governments: national strategies or action plans

48. In the Platform for Action, Governments have made a commitment with regard to institutional arrangements for the implementation of the Platform at the national level. The importance of effective national machinery is stressed in paragraph 296 Paragraph 297 calls for the preparation of implementation strategies or plans of action by the end of 1996. Particular emphasis is placed on their comprehensiveness, the provision of time-bound targets and benchmarks for monitoring, and resource allocation or reallocation for implementation. The role of non-governmental organizations in such processes is noted in paragraph 298. The Platform also suggests improving the role of the United Nations resident coordinator system to take full account of the Platform for Action (para. 341).

49. The General Assembly, in its resolution 51/69 of 12 December 1996, welcomed the progress made by Governments in developing comprehensive implementation strategies or plans of action, including time-bound targets and benchmarks for monitoring. It also urged all Governments that have not yet done so to undertake efforts in that regard in order to fully implement the Platform.

50. In a note verbale of 13 May 1996, the Secretary-General invited all Member States to provide the Secretariat with copies of their national implementation strategies or plans of action as soon as they are completed. As recommended in Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/6, those national action plans will serve as a basis for the preparation of a synthesized report on implementation plans of Governments and the United Nations system, which will be submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-second session, in 1998.

51. As of 15 January 1997, 25 member States have complied with this request. Several others have informed the Commission secretariat that such information will be forthcoming. Although a limited number of national plans of action have been made available to the secretariat, the discussion at the fifty-first session of the General Assembly emphasized that a significant number of Member States have undertaken steps in implementing the Platform, and that many Governments are either in the process of preparing their national strategies or action plans or have already done so.

52. Based on a preliminary analysis of the national plans received to date, the following general trends can be identified. In addition to completed plans, a few of the replies received in response to the note verbale either provided a draft of a national plan or preview of a plan under preparation, or indicated that the preparatory process would be concluded within a certain period of time. The status at the national level of a few plans received was unclear (i.e., whether the plan had been adopted or endorsed by the Government, whether it had been brought to the attention of Parliament, whether it had been promulgated by decree, or a similar action). In such instances, it was not fully apparent how the process of implementation of the plan would proceed. In some cases, a plan had been prepared by the national machinery for the advancement of women without any indication of its subsequent adoption by the Government. In some cases, the implementation of the Platform is subsumed under existing action plans for the advancement of women, or will be incorporated into the next medium-term

development plan. Information was also provided on activities already implemented.

53. Many of the plans indicated that the Platform for Action had been given wide publicity in the country, had been translated or summarized into the national language, or had been disseminated by the Government or by non-governmental organizations.

54. In a number of countries, a special body or coordinating committee has been set up to guide follow-up. Several plans indicated that there would be a strengthening of institutional mechanisms, in particular of national machinery. Many of the plans have been prepared in a cooperative effort between the national machinery, Government ministries and other governmental entities at the national/local level, non-governmental organizations and actors of civil society. Many of the plans state that, although the national machinery will assume a coordinating and monitoring role, individual ministries are responsible for incorporating relevant follow-up to the Platform into their sectoral programmes. Some state specifically that mainstreaming of a gender perspective into all policies and programmes is to receive priority attention.

55. Few plans cover all critical areas of concern; instead, most focus on a selected number of areas or issues, sometimes choosing priorities among those. Areas most often covered are poverty, participation in decision-making, education, economy, health, violence and human rights. Few plans provide specific benchmarks or targets, or time-frames for implementation. Most commonly, benchmarks are given in the area of education and health, such as the reduction of female illiteracy by a certain percentage by a certain date. Several plans indicate that resources for follow-up to the Platform will be increased, or that such resources will be sought in future national budgets.

56. Most plans provide for a combination of legislative actions, including the reform of discriminatory legislation, with policy and programme measures, as well as targeted projects in specific sectors for particular groups of women or in particular geographic areas. Plans include the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women or the withdrawal of reservations to the Convention.

57. The importance of integrated follow-up to all United Nations conferences was mentioned. It was also stated that a particular emphasis would be placed on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women in bilateral and multilateral development cooperation. As most of the plans received had been prepared before the Subregional Conference of Senior Governmental Experts held at Bucharest developed a model national action plan, the influence of that meeting remains somewhat limited to date.[2]

58. Accordingly, the Commission secretariat reiterates its invitation to all Governments to provide it with their completed national action plans. Similarly, the secretariat would welcome receiving brief progress reports on the status of plans, their implementation or any other additional information that might be available in conjunction with the national implementation process. Any completed national plans should be made available to the secretariat no later

than 30 May 1997 in order to serve as input for the preparation of the synthesized report for 1998.

59. The Commission secretariat also wishes to recall that the Directory of National Machinery for the Advancement of Women is being updated. To that end, a questionnaire has been sent to all Governments inviting them to return the completed questionnaires by 15 October 1996; the deadline was subsequently extended to 2 December 1996. To date, the secretariat has received more than 70 replies. In order to ensure that comprehensive information will be included in the Directory, all Governments are urged to return the completed questionnaires no later than 21 March 1997.

F. Reported follow-up by non-governmental organizations

60. Since the most recent report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/51/322), a number of events under the auspices of non-governmental organizations have occurred. For example, in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, an international conference on violence, abuse and women's citizenship was convened at Brighton by a consortium of non-governmental organizations from 10 to 15 November 1996. A national conference for young girls was organized at UNICEF headquarters, New York, by the United States National Young Girls Coalition on 3 and 4 January 1997. An international conference on eliminating poverty in old age was organized from 12 to 14 December 1996 in Malta by the International Institute on Ageing. An international conference on the Asia Pacific Economic Council was held on 15 and 16 November at Manila as a parallel forum during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit.

61. The Inter-Parliamentary Union will hold an international symposium at New Delhi from 14 to 18 February 1997 on the theme "Towards partnership between men and women in politics". In cooperation with Women's World Banking and the Grameen Bank, the World Bank, Citibank and UNDP will hold a microcredit summit at Washington, D.C., from 2 to 4 February 1997, with a major focus on credit for women. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation, in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, will hold an international seminar on promoting the empowerment of women through adult learning at Bangkok from 24 to 28 February 1997.

II. REPORTS PREPARED IN ACCORDANCE WITH SPECIFIC MANDATES

A. Situation of Palestinian women and assistance provided by the organizations of the United Nations system

62. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1996/5 on Palestinian women, requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation and to assist Palestinian women by all available means, and to submit to the Commission, at its forty-first session, a report on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

63. The Commission on the Status of Women, in accordance with paragraph 260 of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women,[3] has continued to monitor the situation of Palestinian women and children. The Fourth World Conference on Women added a new dimension to that reporting when it endorsed the importance of integrating a gender perspective in all policies and programmes of the agencies and bodies of the United Nations system. With regard to the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, the mainstreaming of a gender perspective would ensure that all actors involved in the monitoring of respect for human rights or in providing assistance to the Palestinian people will take a gender dimension into account when fulfilling their mandates or designing and implementing their programmes.

64. Recent social and economic developments that occurred in 1996 and that had a particular gender impact are described below. Emphasis is placed on selected new developments and trends that have not been reported previously (see E/CN.6/1995/8 and E/CN.6/1996/8).

1. Situation of Palestinian women

65. When reviewing the economic and social situation of Palestinian women and respect for human rights throughout 1996, the conditions of Palestinian women living in the Palestinian self-rule areas and in the occupied territories remain of particular concern. Life in the self-rule areas has continued to be affected by measures undertaken by the Israeli authorities, including various military and economic measures, that have had an impact on social and economic development. The West Bank and Gaza Strip were entirely sealed on several occasions in the wake of suicide bomb attacks in Israel, thus preventing workers with valid permits from entering Israel and East Jerusalem. The economy remains dominated by the detrimental impact of the occupation, in particular the labour market imbalance (see UNCTAD/ECDC/SEV/12). As a result of the loss of employment in Israel and a decline in the trade flow caused by frequent and long-term closures, the real gross national product in the West Bank and Gaza Strip declined 22.7 per cent between 1992 and 1996. The unemployment rate increased and income levels dropped. By mid-1996, the average unemployment rate was 29.2 per cent in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, nearly 60 per cent higher than at the end of 1995. The unemployment rate has been magnified by the effect of high population growth rates and the large number of young people entering the labour market every year. Since 1995, real wages have fallen about 20 per cent.[4] The drop in household income was partly compensated by remittances from Palestinians abroad and by drawing on resources, such as savings.

66. The economic situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has exacerbated the hardship of many families, in particular households with low incomes or those headed by females. It is accepted that economic distortions tend to affect the poorest groups in society most. Owing to their economic and legal status, women are affected more severely than men.[5] It was estimated that 40 to 42 per cent of the Arab residents of Jerusalem, for example, live below the poverty line (see A/51/99/Add.1). Women and children, especially female-headed households, are particularly exposed to poverty.

67. The economic pressure caused by the inability of the male income-earner to provide adequately for the household and the high unemployment rates among men have caused women and children to start looking for work to maintain family living levels. There is a reported increase of 8.5 per cent in the number of women in the paid labour force in 1996, whereas the male labour force grew by only 5.1 per cent over the same period. A survey also found a participation rate as high as 11.5 per cent for children, mainly boys, in the labour force, a rate that is even higher than that of women. The highest concentration of female labour is in the agriculture sector, in which 35 per cent of women work for low wages and with unfavourable working conditions. However, there is also a high concentration of female workers (32.5 per cent of all workers) in relatively well-paid professional, technical and clerical positions. It is possible that women's increased participation in the formal labour market will become a new trend in Palestinian economic and social development that therefore needs to be taken into account.[6]

68. During the period under review, fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of movement, education, religion and expression, have been affected by various measures linked to occupation. Forms of collective punishment, such as the demolition or sealing of houses and rooms, imposition of curfews and the sealing off or closing of areas have been frequently reported, mostly in retaliation for attacks by suicide bombers (see A/51/99 and Add.1, 2 and 3). All population groups are affected by such measures, but some target women in particular. For example, since many Palestinian women work in the agricultural sector they are particularly affected by the land seizure, loss of water utilization and other economic and social repercussions of Israeli settlement (see A/51/135).

69. Another punishment that affects women was the confiscation of the identity cards of wives of Jerusalem residents who live abroad, and who under Israeli law lose their identity card if they leave the city for more than seven years (see A/51/99/Add.1, para. 215). Civilians have been exposed to harassment and physical ill-treatment. Palestinians, including women in labour, have been reported to be denied access to medical treatment in specialized hospitals (see A/51/99/Add.1, para. 167). It has also been noted that Palestinian women have been humiliated and harassed during raids on their homes. There have been continuing problems regarding Palestinian women detainees in Israeli prisons who have not yet been released in accordance with Israeli-Palestinian agreements (see A/51/99/Add.1, paras. 322 and 327).

70. The field of education continues to represent a major challenge to the Palestinian Authority and the donor community. With population growth for 1996 expected to be close to 6 per cent, the continuing provision of quality education for all boys and girls is of concern. It has been projected that 858 elementary schools and the same number of secondary schools would need to be built by the year 2000 to cater for the school-age population (see UNCTAD/ECDC/SEV/12, table IV-4). Frequent closures of the self-rule areas in 1996 have again prevented students and teachers from reaching their schools. As a result of those and similar measures during the Intifadah, which have been aggravated by conditions of overcrowding and lack of teaching materials, the educational achievements of Palestinians are jeopardized. Women and girls are being particularly affected, which has contributed to the fact that the illiteracy rate of Palestinian women remains higher than that of Palestinian

men. In February 1996, the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics published the findings of a demographic survey conducted among 14,854 households in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (not including East Jerusalem). According to the findings, 16 per cent of all residents aged over 15 were illiterate, with female illiteracy standing at 24 per cent (see A/51/99/Add.1, para. 224).

71. According to UNICEF, health conditions and provision of health services in the West Bank and Gaza Strip remain poor. The impact on the reproductive health of Palestinian women is of particular concern. Total fertility rates remain very high. For example, the average estimated total fertility rate for the period 1990-1995 in the Gaza Strip was 8.8 children per woman.[7] Low age at marriage, short birth intervals and lack of education are factors responsible for the poor health of many Palestinian women, in particular refugee women, of whom many are anaemic.

72. It should be noted that Palestinian women maintain a high level of participation in non-governmental organizations and women's committees. Progress can be reported on the establishment of national machinery for the advancement of women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Palestinian Authority has set up an intergovernmental committee under the Gender Development and Planning Directorate of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. A non-governmental organizations committee has been formed under the General Union of Palestinian Women.

2. United Nations assistance to Palestinian women

73. In Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/5, the Council urged organizations of the United Nations system, among others, to provide financial and technical assistance to Palestinian women. During 1995-1996, a number of projects for Palestinian women were initiated and carried out by the United Nations system and bilateral donors, in close cooperation with the Palestinian Authority and non-governmental organizations. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/58 H, entitled "Assistance to the Palestinian people", a coordinated, integrated and targeted programme was elaborated and is being implemented under the leadership of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (see A/51/171). Activities for women have focused mainly on health and family planning, relief and social services, education and training, collection of statistics disaggregated by sex, and support for the national machinery for the advancement of women, including training on legal literacy and the enhancement of women's role in public life.

74. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continued to emphasize the improvement of socio-economic conditions within the Palestine refugee community in its operations. Some 3.31 million Palestinian refugees were registered with UNRWA in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as of 30 June 1996, of whom women of reproductive age and children below the age of five comprised two thirds. UNRWA placed special emphasis on maternal and child-health care as an integral part of its regular programme. UNRWA increased its family-planning services in the Gaza Strip, offering services in 120 UNRWA health centres in 1996, up from 49 in 1992. A tripartite mission of UNRWA, UNFPA and the

Palestinian Authority developed in October 1995 a strategic plan and operational framework for a women's health programme, covering reproductive health and family planning (see A/51/13).

75. Education and vocational training remain a field of major activities for UNRWA. Some 49.5 per cent of the total school population and half of the 12,000 teaching staff are female, making UNRWA schools one of the first in the Middle East to achieve gender equality. Eight vocational and technical training centres offer a wide range of courses at the post-preparatory and post-secondary level, and have enrolled 1,273 women in the total of 4,624 training places. Vocational training for women has been provided in typical female jobs, such as clothing production, hairdressing and beauty care. UNRWA seeks to raise the proportion of women trainees by expanding courses more likely to attract women, such as nursing, computer science and business and office practice. Out of 943 scholarships granted to refugee pupils, 437 or 46.3 per cent were awarded to women.

76. The UNRWA programme for women in development seeks to involve Palestinian refugee women in remunerative economic activity. Some 11,000 women received training in the production of goods or management of services, together with basic business skills. Some 1,089 women supporting 8,200 dependants participated in a solidarity-group lending programme that provided credit ranging from US$ 330 to US$ 8,000 for refugee women in microenterprises or working as street vendors. In UNRWA's small-scale enterprise programme, offering loans for capital investment to new and expanding enterprises and working capital to established enterprises ranging in value from US$ 1,000 to US$ 75,000, 10 per cent of the credits were given to women. Through its special hardship programme, UNRWA provided material and financial aid to refugee families who met the UNRWA criteria of being without a male adult medically fit to earn an income and without other financial support sufficient to cover basic needs, which represented 5.4 per cent of the registered refugee population.

77. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) gives assistance to Palestinian women within the framework of a UNDP-assisted project on capacity-building in agricultural policy analysis and planning, which was formulated in 1995. Gender issues are mainstreamed into the major components of the projects: policy advice, including the preparation of a gender-sensitive agricultural development strategy; training in policy analysis and planning; institutional support; and agricultural statistics and establishing a database. Of particular significance is the establishment of the Rural Development/ Advancement of Women Unit within the Department of Agricultural Policies and Planning of the Ministry of Agriculture.

78. The programme of technical assistance to the Palestinian Authority provided by the International Labour Organization (ILO) is the third largest in the United Nations system, following UNRWA and UNDP. The ILO activities for women have been carried out mainly as components of major ILO programmes. The Training Centre of the International Labour Organization at Turin has developed a three-year programme for the socio-economic promotion of Palestinian women, focusing on the training of women for entrepreneurship. The ILO also carried out a study on gender and critical analysis of Palestinian law and practice

regarding women workers, and organized a training course on the promotion of women worker's rights and equality in employment.

79. The World Health Organization (WHO) has conducted a situation analysis of women's health and development. It assisted the Ministry of Health and the coordination of various providers of women's health services within and outside the Ministry in preparing a strategic national plan on the role of women in health and development. Further areas of priority are primary health care, leadership training for nurses and nursing management, training on nutrition and provision of immunization.

80. UNICEF supports strategies that promote basic education for all, health promotion and empowerment of women in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Priority was given to children in underprivileged communities, especially in the rural poor communities in the West Bank and in refugee camps, while building on the capacity of local institutions to address the needs of those children and focusing on the girl child. Gender issues were integrated into programming and training programmes. The Palestinian Authority received technical assistance in prioritizing issues in women's health. In cooperation with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF finalized a multiple indicator cluster survey to provide reliable data on the situation of Palestinian women and men. UNICEF provided support for capacity-building to institutions of the Palestinian Authority, and considered the formulation of a national programme of action as an immediate goal so as to ensure political and social mobilization as well as long-term planning for children, in particular the girl child.

81. The UNDP Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP/PAPP) has implemented projects to foster and promote the full participation of Palestinian women in public life and in all aspects of Palestinian social and economic development. It has supported Palestinian women's initiatives through an extensive network of institutions, including the work of the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counselling on gender sensitive amendments to legislation, the Palestinian Center for Democracy and Elections awareness-raising campaign for rural women, and the work of the Palestinian Coalition for Women's Health. It has also encouraged activities that promote a positive representation of women in audio, visual and written media. Technical assistance and staff training was provided to several women's units within the ministries of the Palestinian Authority. In addition, UNDP/PAPP has enabled Palestinian women to participate in the Woman's Observer Mission to the Election in Nicaragua.

82. UNIFEM, through partnership with non-governmental and governmental organizations, works towards strengthening the role of Palestinian women in the economy, governance, conflict resolution and peace-building. In the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, a project entitled "Post-Beijing follow-up operation" has been launched in April 1996, also involving four other countries of the Western Asia region (Jordan, Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen). UNIFEM's goal is to promote the implementation of the Platform for Action and to assist in defining national strategies for the advancement of women. It also intends to strengthen working relations between non-governmental organizations and Governments, and to consolidate coordination and networking among non-governmental organizations at the national, regional and international levels. UNIFEM also carries out a project for the economic empowerment of women

in Gaza, training women on how to start their own business and providing assistance for access to credit and business counselling services.

83. The World Food Programme (WFP) currently targets 6,600 households in the Gaza Strip registered by the Ministry of Social Affairs as hardship cases. The majority of those households are headed by women with a large number of dependants. WFP provides food assistance, pays special attention to primary health care, and supports two projects for pregnant women, nursing mothers and pre-school children. The programme distributes food aid as take-home family rations to encourage poor women to visit clinics and health centres operated by local non-governmental organizations.

84. UNFPA activities for Palestinian women have increased consistently since 1987, when small-scale maternal and child-health training and research was started. In 1995, UNFPA helped to establish a women's centre for reproductive health services, social assistance, legal counselling and community education in the Gaza Strip. As part of the reproductive health activities of the UNFPA Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (1996-1999) and in collaboration with WHO, support is provided to the establishment of the Women's Health and Development Department of the Ministry of Health. The projects involve, inter alia, training of the Department's staff on the management of reproductive health programmes, conducting research on policies, service delivery and socio-cultural aspects of reproductive health.

85. The World Bank, in its initial activities in the occupied territories, focused on emergency reconstruction and rehabilitation, and only incidentally on gender. In response to the deteriorating economic conditions, the World Bank's programme has concentrated primarily on short-term emergency assistance, with an emphasis on the rehabilitation of public works. As the Bank reports, future Bank-supported activities on strengthening civil society, education and health, will address gender issues. The Education and Health Rehabilitation Project (1995-1997) is of particular interest to women since it is rehabilitating and constructing schools for girls in Gaza. Women will also benefit from the rehabilitation of hospitals in Gaza. The Palestinian non-governmental organization project, proposed for early 1997, will seek to mobilize official and private donor funds to support the activities of non-governmental organizations in the West Bank and Gaza. Although many non-governmental organization subprojects will be demand-driven, it is expected that many projects will target women's income-generating projects and mother and child-health services.

86. Within the United Nations Secretariat, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, in its 1996-1997 work programme, initiated a multidisciplinary activity assessing the role of non-governmental organizations in the occupied territories and the Palestinian self-rule areas. The project focuses on income-generation, agriculture, industry and other areas, and considers prospects for networking among non-governmental organizations. The Division for Palestinian Rights within the Department of Political Affairs and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in executing their programme of work, make efforts to highlight the situation of Palestinian women and children and to involve women in various aspects of their programmes, such as inviting Palestinian women to participate as panelists in non-governmental

organization symposia and seminars, and in new training activities. In a follow-up activity to the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development facilitated the participation of a Palestinian expert to its workshop on global information through computer networking technology, organized in New York in June 1996.

3. Conclusions

87. As regards United Nations assistance to Palestinian women, it is recommended that the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system continue to incorporate a gender perspective in their activities. A gender perspective should also be integrated into the monitoring of possible violations of women's human rights, notably the monitoring carried out by the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, and the Special Rapporteur on the Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967. In the case of the Special Committee, for example, it would be desirable to achieve a better perspective on the violations of the human rights of women and their needs and concerns by inviting more women to give oral testimonials before the Committee.

88. Women's status and potential roles in socio-economic development, their needs and interests need to be systematically considered in the preparations of overall economic and social development plans for Palestine and the Occupied Territories. While the international donor community has made a commitment to empower Palestinian women and enhance their role in society, including in public life, in leadership positions and through income-generating projects and vocational training, when it comes to programmes for macroeconomic development and market economy, gender needs are not as fully addressed. Women's increasing role in the labour market must be taken into account on a more consistent basis.

B. Release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts and imprisoned

89. A report on the implementation of Commission resolution 40/1 on the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts and imprisoned was requested by the Commission for its forty-first session. Consequently, the Commission secretariat requested information from relevant United Nations entities on the implementation of that resolution.

90. From the four responses received by the secretariat, it was clear that there was no systematic collection of data and information on the release of women and children taken hostage in various situations of conflict around the world.

91. UNHCR pointed out that the question fell within the competence of the International Committee of the Red Cross. It also noted the difficulties in obtaining global figures since the circumstances of the detention and release of women and children hostages vary from situation to situation.

92. The Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat focused its response on the situation in Angola, Guatemala, Lebanon and Bosnia and Herzegovina. With regard to the situation in Angola, the United Nations Angola Verification Mission reported that women and children were still being taken hostage and that it was currently examining petitions relating to 11 such cases arising from the first extraordinary session of the Joint Commission devoted to Human Rights, held on 8 May 1996, and from resolution 40/1 of the Commission on the Status of Women. Information on several United Nations peacekeeping missions indicated either that there was no knowledge of such cases (as in the case of the United Nations Mission for the Verification of Human Rights in Guatemala) or that such cases were not formally registered (as in the case of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In cases of kidnapping in Bosnia and Herzegovina, immediate investigations are carried out by the United Nations International Police Task Force. No figures were submitted, however. It was noted that the kidnapping of women and children in Guatemala was related to profit rather than to the political situation.

93. In its response, UNICEF referred to the report prepared by the expert of the Secretary-General, Ms. Graça Michel, on the impact of armed conflict on children, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/157 (see A/51/306 and Add.1). Although the report gives extensive information on violations of the rights of women and children, it does not provide specific information pertinent to the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflict and imprisoned.

94. With respect to the release of women and children taken hostage during armed conflicts and imprisoned, an important step for improving the situation would be for the Governments concerned to ratify without delay and to implement all relevant international instruments and Conventions, and for practical and cost-effective measures to be taken to collect information on women and children hostages on a systematic basis. Non-governmental organizations working in the field might also contribute to that effort.

Notes

[1] Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1996, Supplement No. 6 (E/1996/26), chap. IC, resolution 40/10, annex, para. 6.

[2] Subregional Conference of Senior Governmental Experts on the Implementation of the Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in Central and Eastern Europe (Bucharest, 12-14 September 1996).

[3] Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.85.IV.10), chap. I, sect. A.

[4] See "Economic and social conditions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip", Quarterly Report (Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories), Autumn 1996.

[5] See World Bank, Toward Gender Equality: The Role of Public Policy (Washington, D.C., 1995).

[6] See "Economic and social conditions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip", loc. cit.

[7] See World Population Prospects, 1996 Revision, forthcoming United Nations publication.

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FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN: IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND ACTION IN THE CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN

Thematic issues before the Commission on the Status of Women

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

In its resolution 1996/6, the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General to submit an analytical report to the Commission on the Status of Women on the thematic issues to be addressed at each session. According to the multi-year programme of work of the Commission, four critical areas of concern set out in the Platform for Action have been selected for review at the present session: education and training of women (chapter IV.B), women and the economy (chapter IV.F), women in power and decision-making (chapter IV.G) and women and the environment (chapter IV.K).

In preparation for the Commission's consideration of agenda item 3 (c), the Division for the Advancement of Women convened expert group meetings on each of the critical areas of concern, focusing on issues that had either not previously received specific attention or that required further exploration in the light of the Platform for Action. The present report addresses strategies to accelerate implementation of the Platform for Action in the four critical areas of concern, drawing on the recommendations of the expert group meetings.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1996/6 of 22 July 1996 requested the Secretary-General to submit an analytical report annually to the Commission on the Status of Women on the thematic issues to be addressed at each session in connection with the implementation of strategic objectives and action in selected critical areas of concern set out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.[1] The four critical areas of concern selected for review at the forty-first session of the Commission are (1) education and training of women (chapter IV.B), (2) women and the economy (chapter IV.F), (3) women in power and decision-making (chapter IV.G) and (4) women and the environment (chapter IV.K). It was requested that the reports on themes submitted to the Commission include recommendations and conclusions and identify the responsible actors, and, as far as possible, be based on available data and information.

2. Just over a year and a half has elapsed since the Platform for Action was adopted. Many Governments are still formulating their action plans for its implementation. Only 25 countries have submitted their strategies or action plans for implementation of the Beijing results to the Secretariat in compliance with General Assembly resolution 50/203 of 22 December 1995. Past experience, together with results from expert group meetings and the interactive dialogues to be held during the Commission in 1997, may serve as a basis for identifying measures which could help to accelerate progress in achieving equality between men and women in the critical areas of concern identified at Beijing as crucial for eliminating discrimination against women and enabling women around the world to fully enjoy their human rights.

3. During 1996, the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat convened expert group meetings on each of the critical areas of concern to be taken up by the Commission at its present session. Each expert group meeting focused on issues that had not previously received the attention of the Commission, and/or that, in the view of the Secretariat, required further exploration in the light of the Platform for Action. In the critical area of concern "education and training of women", the focus of the expert group meeting was on vocational training and lifelong learning. This focus was selected as a follow-up to an earlier expert group meeting held in 1994 on the broader topic of promotion of literacy, education and training for women, the results of which were used in preparing the Platform for Action. In the area of women and the economy, the expert group meeting focused on the need for more women in top management positions. In the critical area of concern relating to women in power and political decision-making, the focus of the expert group meeting was the impact of gender difference on conflict resolution, keeping in mind that other aspects of political decision-making had been thoroughly discussed by the Commission in the past. In the area of women and the environment, the expert group meeting focused on the crucial links between population, environment and sustainable development from a gender perspective, emphasizing the role of women as actors in relation to environmental issues and the need to increase their participation in decision-making. The aim of all four expert group meetings held in 1996 was to identify policy measures to accelerate the achievement of equality between men and women, the elimination of discrimination, and women's

empowerment in the context of the Platform for Action. The recommendations emanating from the expert group meetings are set out extensively in the present report. The reports themselves are available as background papers in one official language only.

4. The present report highlights the importance of having more women in decision-making positions at all levels and identifies some of the positive measures that can be carried out to achieve this. In this regard, education is a prerequisite for women's full and equal participation in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making and as leaders in the public sphere. It also emphasizes responsibilities of Governments, civil society and the United Nations system in this regard and points out that women themselves need to become active players and network among themselves and with men in the movement towards equality and empowerment.

5. The report indicates that a rethinking of the development approach from a gender perspective is necessary. There is need for a different perspective that integrates the micro and macro, bridges the public and private domains (especially the productive and reproductive spheres) and empowers both women and men to take part in decision-making at all levels. The Platform for Action places considerable emphasis on the importance of increasing the number of women in decision-making in order that their voices can be heard and their needs taken into account.

6. The rationale for promoting women as decision makers is elaborated in the Platform for Action, mainly in chapter IV.G (Women in power and decision-making). In paragraph 181, the Platform for Action recalls that achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy - it will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and will allow women's interests to be taken more directly into account.

7. The Commission's attention is particularly drawn to sections I.E, II.C, III.D and IV.D entitled "Strategies to accelerate implementation".

I. EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF WOMEN

8. The Fourth World Conference on Women, in line with previous world conferences, recognized the central role of education for the advancement of women and for equality between men and women. It is widely acknowledged that women's education yields numerous benefits, including higher economic productivity, decreased maternal and infant mortality, improved family health and nutrition, delayed marriages and lower birth rates. The returns on women's basic education are especially high since they promote the personal empowerment of women, the status of their families and the community at large. Education and training are prerequisites for their full and equal participation in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making and for becoming leaders. Education and the school system play an important role in the democratization process that is taking place in many regions and in which the gender aspects need to be fully integrated. It also has to be borne in mind,

given the lagged effect of education, that changes introduced have no immediate impact, but become visible only after one generation.

9. As noted earlier, in 1994 an Expert Group Meeting on Gender, Education and Training examined the rationale for female education, obstacles to it, progress achieved at all levels of formal schooling and the complementary role of non-formal education.[2] The recommendations were directed mainly at measures that would eliminate the gender gap in education and remove bias in school materials and teacher training. Attention was paid to girls and women in especially difficult circumstances, such as refugees. The recommendations formed the basis for the critical area of concern "education and training of women" in chapter IV.B of the Platform for Action.

10. Linked to this previous work, the Division for the Advancement of Women examined two areas in education that build on primary and secondary education and are of particular relevance for the economic, social and political empowerment of women. These are technical and vocational training and lifelong learning as a tool for capacity-building of women on a broad scale. It was felt that vocational training and women's preparation for the labour market has been not adequately and extensively considered, either in the preparatory process for the Fourth World Conference on Women or in the Platform for Action. Given the fact that women are entering the labour market in unprecedented numbers in all regions, there is an urgent need to evaluate whether they are adequately prepared or whether, due to their lack of preparation, they remain in unfavourable positions and at the edge of exploitation. In this respect it is the quality of education that women receive that is at stake. Directly linked to this question is the responsibility of the various actors in education, in particular the role and responsibility of the Government. In order to explore the issues further, the Division for the Advancement of Women organized an Expert Group Meeting on Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning of Women, which took place at the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization at Turin, Italy, from 2 to 6 December 1996. The present report draws extensively on the conclusions and recommendations of the Meeting.

A. Recent developments and trends

11. In education and training, gender analysis is seen as a tool to further analyse the issue and to bring about comprehensive, innovative proposals for policy-making that take into account the gender variable. A gender perspective needs to be applied to human resources development for which education is the basis. It is necessary to examine whether girls and women have the same access as men and boys to formal education, retention and equal possibilities in obtaining school diplomas, and retraining in all fields. Progress has been made in the past 10 years in collecting data disaggregated by sex on education and training, including data on access, performance and fields of study. Gender differences have been analysed and educational policies developed that would remove bias and enhance equality in education between men and women. However, the link between the education of women and their integration into the economy, their role in sustainable development and their participation in political life has yet to be fully recognized.

12. Significant gains have been made in improving the access of girls and women to education and the quality of their education. However, women continue to account for the majority of the world's adult illiterates, whose numbers have undergone a phenomenal expansion from 1980 to 1995. Steadily climbing, the proportion of women among the world's illiterates reached 63.8 per cent in 1995. It is projected that the absolute number would decline as from the second half of the 1990s, but women's share could reach 64 per cent by the year 2000, if the present trend continues. As of today, only some 70 countries in the world have attained gender parity in literacy. The huge number of illiterates, which is highest in the least developed countries, constitute the major challenge to education. To a large extent, the increases in adult illiteracy in Southern Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States have been the net result of literacy progress falling behind rapid population growth. Illiteracy remains highest among older women who have never had the opportunity of formal or non-formal schooling. Female literacy levels have been improving much faster than those for men for the age groups below 55, and for the age groups 15-39 in particular they have been improving twice as fast.[3]

13. In most regions, the male-female gap in enrolment at the different levels of education is now narrowing. However, huge differences persist in access to primary education in some parts of Africa, in particular sub-Saharan Africa, and in Central Asia compared to other regions. More than two thirds of the children who never go to school or who drop out before completing school are girls. In Eastern Asia and Oceania and Latin America and the Caribbean, the first level gross enrolment ratios for both males and females exceed 100 per cent, indicating that both sexes are fully enrolled in school. In Latin America and the Caribbean and in many developed countries, the male-female disparity in enrolment ratios has practically disappeared. In fact, the disparity in enrolment in second and third levels is now in favour of females in many countries. This development has occurred recently and has not been fully explained. Among other reasons, it is attributed to early school-leaving and migration of boys in search of work.[4] Another possible explanation is that women strive for high levels of formal qualification in response to the competition with men for limited employment opportunities. Women still concentrate in a few fields of study. Despite improvements in access to education, the quality of education that girls receive is a source of concern given the stereotyping and biases that persist in teaching materials and in the delivery system, including location of schools, subjects offered and teachers' attitudes.

B. The link to the labour market

14. As the quantity and quality of jobs available for men and women is either being threatened or undergoing major changes, employability has become the key in access to both employment and self-employment opportunities. Given the constraints and unequal opportunities that women face in the labour market, it is particularly important to develop women's employability. Knowledge, skills and competencies of both men and women have become the cornerstone not only of personal growth and employability, but also of the competitiveness of enterprises and the economic and sustainable development of societies. In a competitive environment, the comparative advantages of every individual,

enterprise and country will increasingly depend on competitive work, based on knowledge, practical skills, innovation and technology. Therefore, investment in the education, training and development of all human resources to their full potential has become more crucial than ever before.

15. As discussed in the section II below, job segregation remains a persistent characteristic of all labour markets, regardless of the level of economic development, female participation and level of education, and despite efforts that have been made to promote women professionals. This segregation originates in the educational choices of men and women and the fields of study and specialization, which remain highly polarized. Discrimination in girls' access to education and training persists in many areas owing to stereotyped role models and inadequate and gender-biased teaching and educational materials, which reduce girls' options for future choices by underestimating or downplaying their talents and capabilities. The vocational training offered to girls and women is very limited in scope and fields of specialization compared with that available to boys and men.

16. It is acknowledged in the field of development assistance that investment in general and basic education has to be the first priority for public policy since it represents the most cost-effective use of public resources for human development. Completion by all children of high-quality primary and lower secondary schooling and the provision of remedial general education to adults in developing countries, while not being sufficient, would make a bigger contribution to equalization than any policy measure affecting training alone. More girls also need to be encouraged to enter technical and scientific fields. A basic education, during which basic skills such as strategic thinking have been acquired in addition to literacy and numeracy, lays a foundation of knowledge that makes further training and retraining effective. Changing patterns of demand in the labour market make a sound general education even more important than in the past and reinforce the need for initial acquisition of broad rather than narrow skills. Given the speed of technological changes and transformations in society and in the workplace, new skills have to be acquired throughout a life course and professional career. In modern sector manufacturing and services for example, broad competencies gained through quality academic secondary education are more significant than specific skills which could be quickly outdated.[5]

17. The Expert Group Meeting on Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning of Women[6] recognized the need for a system of skill development which was open, flexible, responsive to change and gender-sensitive, and which catered also for re-entrants to the workforce. Such training schemes could also include remedial education for adults, in particular for illiterate adult women. Given the increase in self-employment, entrepreneurial skills for small business need to be further developed and intensified. A new approach should be taken for training women in informal employment and self-employment as well as in non-traditional occupations. Any training package for women should include training in legal literacy and decision-making. More women should be drawn to science and technology and participate in the process from the design to the application, monitoring and evaluation of new technologies.

C. Lifelong learning from a gender perspective

18. Due to the explosion of knowledge, the high speed of social change and technical developments, pure factual school knowledge is becoming increasingly obsolete. Instead of being confined to a fixed number of years of schooling during childhood and youth, it is widely recognized that education is now to be made available throughout life. Lifelong learning requires that individuals acquire generic skills and aptitudes, for example, "learning to learn skills", that will enable women to take responsibility for their development and motivate them to learn, to seek opportunities for self-development and to be sensitive to changes taking place in the environment and to the options available to respond to these changes. Learning at various stages of life is a major key for removing obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life. Lifelong learning can bring empowerment and be an end in itself, but the credits of lifelong learning go much further and contribute to the economic and social development of each society. Lifelong learning includes knowledge and skills gained in formal education and training as well as learning that occurs in informal settings, a type of learning that is of particular relevance to women. The wider scope of lifelong learning with regard to the upgrading of skills, and the ongoing acquisition of knowledge beyond that accumulated during youth need to be examined without gender blindness. Gender differences exist with regard to requests and needs for lifelong learning, in delivery systems and educational approaches.

19. Elderly women deserve special attention in the field of continuing education. Recent demographic trends show that women worldwide outlive men and have a higher life expectancy. Elderly women are a resource of accumulated knowledge, skills and experiences. They need continuous training possibilities to live a fulfilling, productive and healthy life. Training is a tool to increase participation in public life, to prevent disease, maintain a healthy lifestyle and keep up activity.

D. Actors responsible for education and training

20. The Fourth World Conference on Women identified various actors responsible for implementing the Platform for Action, noting that "Governments have the primary responsibility for implementing the Platform for Action" and to that end, "commitment at the highest political level is essential" (Platform for Action, para. 293). In the fields of vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education, actions should be taken by Governments "in cooperation with employers, workers and trade unions, international and non-governmental organizations, including women's and youth organizations, and educational institutions" (Platform for Action, para. 82). The main responsibility of Governments is to "provide the required budgetary resources to the educational sector, with reallocation within the educational sector to ensure increased funds for basic education" (Platform for Action, para. 84 (a)) and "to monitor the implementation of educational reforms and measures in relevant ministries, and establish technical assistance programmes" (Platform for Action, para. 84 (b)). The responsibility of each actor needs to be scrutinized and, if possible, incentives offered that could enhance their active role in implementing the recommendations.

21. While implementing the recommendation of the Platform for Action in the field of education, it is important to consider recent developments in the field of educational policies. In most countries of the world, education and training systems are undergoing reform geared to improve their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, equality and sustainability in responding to the new requirements of the world of work. Responsibilities of Governments are clearly defined with regard to the provision of universal primary education, but vary when it comes to higher education or vocational training. There is a general understanding that it is the Government that has to ensure standards and gender equality in higher levels of education and in vocational training. Today there is a trend to redefine the role of the State and reduce its direct involvement in the provision of vocational training, while assigning increasing responsibilities to the private sector, in particular enterprises and individuals. The question is whether Governments should take up new functions in regulating the overall system, in which diverse public and private actors would compete in an open market. While these changes open up new opportunities for lifelong learning for both men and women, they also bring up new risks, in particular for those groups and sectors that remain at a disadvantage in access to a market-based training system. Privatization, decentralization, reduced public funding and increased dominance of enterprises in training may diminish the possibilities for girls and women to enhance their employability and career development through access to good quality training.

22. Although it is recognized that the benefits from investing in girls' and women's education are great and can be quantified, the market fails to capture the full benefit to society of investing in women and girls. At this moment, it is Governments that should take the lead where the market fails or is absent. Public policy can contribute, directly or indirectly, to reducing gender inequalities - for example, by modifying the legal and regulatory framework to ensure equal opportunities, by redirecting public policies and public expenditures to those investments with the highest social returns or by adopting targeted interventions that correct for gender inequalities at the micro level.[7]

23. Many training systems, especially in developing countries, lack the necessary resources to adopt new technologies and approaches and the capability to respond rapidly to labour market demand. They continue to provide training which may be irrelevant to the labour market or for entrepreneurial development. Particular importance needs to be given to the continuation of a process of investment in human capital through teaching women new kinds of skills. The demands of changing work environments require wider profiles of the teaching content, a higher level of education and an emphasis on thinking skills.

24. Alliances among the various partners at the national and international levels, including the State, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, women's groups, trade unions, employers' federations, cooperatives, research and higher educational institutions, international organizations and others, are needed to bring these prospects for training and development of women's skills to reality. The private sector in particular will play an increasingly important part.

25. Whatever its role in the financing and provision of training, the State has the responsibility for promoting equality between men and women, through

incentives, legislation, advocacy and other measures. This would include ensuring that adequate value, in the sense of both status and earnings, is given to women's work. International organizations also play a useful role in advocating gender equality in vocational training. This is an area for political action, with women's groups and workers' organizations, national and international, exerting pressure to capitalize on the gains already made in this area. There is need for the establishment and maintenance of effective labour market information systems that should not only provide gender-sensitive data, qualitative as well as quantitative, but also guide the development and delivery of training programmes and assist women in selecting the types of training and jobs that best fit their needs. Finally, both national and international structures are needed to monitor and support the implementation of education and training programmes for women.

E. Strategies to accelerate implementation

26. The Platform for Action, in identifying "education and training of women" as one of the 12 critical areas of concern, defined six strategic objectives to achieve equality: (1) ensure equal access to education; (2) eradicate illiteracy among women; (3) improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education; (4) develop non-discriminatory education and training; (5) allocate sufficient resources for and monitor the implementation of educational reforms; (6) promote lifelong education and training for girls and women (chapter IV.B).

27. Education and training is one of the few critical areas of concern where unanimous agreement was reached with regard to benchmarks - the provision of universal access to and gender equality in the completion of primary education for girls by the year 2000 (Platform for Action, para. 81 (b)); the elimination of the gender gap in basic and functional literacy, as recommended in the World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien) (para. 81 (c)); the provision of universal access to basic education and completion of primary education by at least 20 per cent of primary school-age children by the year 2000; the closing of the gender gap in primary and secondary education by the year 2005; the provision of universal primary education in all countries before the year 2015 (para. 80 (b)); and reduction of the female illiteracy rate to at least half its 1990 level, with emphasis on rural women, migrant, refugee and internally displaced women and women with disabilities (para. 81 (a)).

28. The Platform for Action also describes actions to be taken in the field of vocational training under the critical areas of concern "women and the economy" (chapter IV.F) and "the girl child" (chapter IV.L). The Platform for Action makes specific reference to lifelong learning, various types of training and continuing education in many other critical areas of concern, in particular to human rights education and legal literacy (paras. 58 (p), 61 (a), 124 (n), 125 (e) and 230 (f)); training in health (paras. 107 (a), (e), (g), (k), (l), (m) and (o) and 108 (a)); training for the participation of women in public life (paras. 195 (c) and (e)); and training for sustainable development (para. 258 (b) (v)). As such, the Fourth World Conference on Women went beyond earlier recommendations in the field of education and training. It built on

previous work but applied a gender perspective and specified the action required and the actors responsible for achieving gender equality.[8]

29. At this stage of the implementation process of the Platform for Action, the Commission on the Status of Women might wish to examine whether the strategic objectives defined at the Fourth World Conference are being implemented and also take into account recommendations made by the Expert Group Meeting on Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning of Women.

30. The Expert Group Meeting concluded, inter alia, that:

(a) Sufficient effort needs to be made by all actors (Governments, national, regional and international bodies, bilateral and multilateral donors and non-governmental organizations) to meet the targets set in the Platform for Action with regard to the eradication of illiteracy and achievement of universal primary education;

(b) It is imperative that education, technical training and lifelong learning are considered as integral parts and a continuum. The concept of training and lifelong learning includes the acquisition of knowledge and skills gained in formal education, as well as learning that occurs in informal ways and traditional knowledge, that prepares women to take an active role in the labour market and the economic and social development of their countries. A holistic approach should be adopted, ensuring that women enjoy equality throughout the process in a new culture of learning involving individuals, enterprises, organizations and society at large;

(c) In the context of a changing world, science and technology education and information services should be given added importance. In order to develop the skills required, women need to have full access to vocational training and further education at all levels of science and technology. To bridge the gender gap and increase the access of girls and women to science and technology education and to vocational training and lifelong learning, action must be taken using a wide range of strategies and mixed modalities;

(d) A gender balance in the teaching profession and educational administration at all levels has to be ensured; to this end administrative reforms to increase the number of female principals, administrators and planners should be undertaken;

(e) The education, training and lifelong learning of women should be mainstreamed in national human development plans and policies, equal opportunity policies and industrial policies with an emphasis on employment and employability of women. National machineries for the advancement of women should urge policy makers in Government and in the private sector to ensure that all these policies are responsive to gender concerns, and that women and their organizations participate in the policy-making processes;

(f) The relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of training should be enhanced through the establishment of alliances among the various partners, including the public and private sectors, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, organizations of employers and cooperatives;

(g) The State has a major responsibility in promoting and facilitating such alliances by developing the regulatory framework, the financing mechanisms, incentive schemes and technical support. Governments should be ultimately responsible for filling gaps in education and training provisions, especially for women in poverty, women in rural and depressed areas and women with social, economic, cultural and physical constraints;

(h) Employers' and workers' organizations also play a critical role in alliances and should be actively involved in decision-making processes and the provision of training at national and decentralized levels;

(i) The revision and reform of textbooks, teaching aids and curricula as well as the removal of bias from teacher training are prerequisites for the development of non-discriminatory education and training;

(j) The creation of an enabling environment for contributions by non-governmental organizations in all fields of education and in particular to lifelong learning is of importance.

II. WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY

31. In addressing the situation of women in the economy, the Platform for Action, in the critical area of concern "women and the economy" (chapter IV.F), focused on three categories of the economically active female population: women as employees, women as entrepreneurs and women as economic decision makers. In the past, considerable attention was given by policy makers to the first two categories, while less attention was given to women as economic decision makers, despite the strategic importance of women's access to economic decision-making processes and structures as highlighted in the Platform for Action (para. 150). Further development of a framework for action and of specific measures to be taken to enhance women's position as economic decision makers is still needed.

32. The Platform for Action stressed that women are virtually absent from or poorly represented in economic decision-making, including the formulation of policies and strategies for the eradication of poverty (para. 47) and decision-making with respect to structural adjustment programmes, loans and grants (para. 151), and that this situation limits their impact on economic structures and policies which have a direct influence on society and on women's and men's relative status (para. 150).

33. As stated in the Platform for Action, "there are considerable differences in women's and men's access to and opportunities to exert power over economic structures in their societies. In most parts of the world, women are virtually absent from or are poorly represented in economic decision-making, including the formulation of financial, monetary, commercial and other economic policies, as well as tax systems and rules governing pay. ... the actual development of ... economic structures and policies has a direct impact on women's and men's access to economic resources, their economic power and consequently the extent of equality between them at the individual and family levels as well as in society as a whole" (para. 150).

34. Among the categories of decision makers in the economy, the group of managers, especially at the highest levels of the hierarchy of economic organizations, is among the most strategic. The International Labour Organization (ILO) establishes a strong linkage between women's access to decision-making and women's position in the labour market through their access to management. ILO considers that, worldwide, a major and persistent form of discrimination against women in the labour market is their segregation in very few occupations. This phenomenon, categorized as occupational segregation, refers to women's persistent presence in a relatively small number of "female" occupations with the singular characteristic that women are found in occupations of low status and pay, while occupations of higher status and pay are dominated by men.[9]

35. As stated by ILO, although over the past decade or so there has been a perceptible upward trend in the representation of women in managerial and administrative categories relative to their share in total employment, to date, women are far under-represented and very few have reached the highest ranks of organizations and institutions and the concept of the "glass ceiling" (an invisible but impassable barrier that prevents women from rising professionally regardless of their education and experience) is widely accepted as reflecting the reality of women's blocked upward mobility to top decision-making levels.

36. The Platform for Action emphasizes that women are increasingly found at lower levels of management (para. 161) and that in the private sector, including transnational and national enterprises, women are largely absent from management and policy levels (para. 162).

37. In strategic objective F.5, the Platform for Action calls for the elimination of occupational segregation by promoting the equal participation of women in highly skilled jobs and senior management positions, and through other measures that stimulate women's on-the-job career development and upward mobility in the labour market, and by stimulating the diversification of occupational choices by both women and men; women should be encouraged to take up non-traditional jobs; and men should be encouraged to seek employment in the social sector (para. 178 (g)).

38. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women states in article 11 that States Parties should take appropriate measures to ensure that women and men have equal rights to the same employment opportunities as well as to free choice of profession and to promotion.

39. In this regard and in order to further elaborate a framework for action and specific measures to be taken to enhance women's access to and impact as senior managers in strategic economic organizations, the Division for the Advancement of Women convened an Expert Group Meeting on Women and Economic Decision-making in International Financial Institutions and Transnational Corporations, which was held at Simmons College Graduate School of Management, Boston, Massachusetts, United States of America, from 11 to 15 March 1996. The main recommendations[10] arising from the Meeting are contained in paragraph 59 below.

A. Women in management: some trends

40. Over the past few decades, a major positive development has been women's increased participation in the labour market. ILO reports that 41 per cent of women aged 15 years and above are economically active in the world today. Moreover, based on the ILO classification of the economically active population by occupational categories, data reveal that over the past decade or so there has been a perceptible upward trend in the representation of women in managerial and administrative categories. However, the increase is far below trends in education and access to formal employment. Currently, very few women are found in the occupational category "administrative and managerial workers"; most women work as professional, technical and related workers (mostly as nurses and teachers), as clerical and service workers and as sales workers.[11]

41. Data collected from various other sources confirm this general trend and furthermore show that, despite the growth in women's employment and the fact that women are becoming fully committed members of the workplace, women managers are under-represented, underutilized and their distribution among the levels of management is skewed in all countries and in all areas, in both the private and public sectors. Even in the traditionally female-dominated professions, such as education and health, women remain largely in secondary positions relative to men.

42. A recent study showed that in the United States of America, where women account for 47 per cent of the work force, they make up only 10 per cent of the officers at the largest United States companies and an average of just 2 per cent of the senior executive positions; and of the 978 women with vice-president-level titles at the 500 largest companies, about 271, or 28 per cent, hold positions dealing directly with revenue generation that are more likely to lead to the highest jobs. Instead, the study stressed, women clustered in staff jobs in such areas as public relations and human resources.[12] In Thailand, while the percentage of women managers increased faster than that of men managers, women's participation reached a mere 19 per cent in 1990 from 7.6 per cent in 1974.[13] In South Africa, a recent survey of 100 South African companies showed that only 41 women occupy executive positions and that the majority of women are at junior levels.[14] In Latin America and the Caribbean, despite a steady increase in the proportion of the economically active female population in administrative and managerial occupations, evidence shows a sustained pattern of segregation in the higher levels of the hierarchy, tending to cluster women managers in mid-level administrative positions. In Venezuela, although women represented 54 per cent of all administrative and managerial workers, women had a share of only 17 per cent of the highest level posts.[15] In the Nordic countries, a recent survey of the 100 largest private enterprises revealed that, in all those countries, the highest proportion for women chief executive officers was 2.6 per cent, and for women board members, 14 per cent.[16] A recent study on sub-Saharan Africa showed that in most financial institutions women managers have not been able to move to the level of assistant general manager.[17]

43. The linkages between women's access to economic decision-making positions at the national and international levels are shown, inter alia, by the rate of participation of women heads of delegation of Member States in the deliberations

of the United Nations on economic and financial questions. The trend, although growing, has been very slow and the levels remain very low. The percentage of women heads of delegation to the Second Committee of the General Assembly reached a level of 13 per cent in 1995 compared with 3.6 per cent in 1985 and 6.0 per cent in 1975. In the Economic and Social Council, women heads of delegation represented 3.3 per cent of all delegations in 1995, reflecting an increase from 1.8 in 1975. In 1985, however, there were no women heads of delegation.[18]

B. Determinants of women's access to management and policy implications

44. Systematic investigation of women in management is relatively new. Until the late 1970s, women remained virtually invisible as managers, and their absence was generally considered a non-issue. Earlier studies showed that in all countries broad societal changes (access to education and employment, and legal changes towards equality) during recent decades resulted in more women entering lower-level managerial positions.[19] In both developed and developing countries, the expansion of banking and other financial services as well as of the public sector also contributed to the opening of opportunities for women in lower- and middle-level management positions during the 1970s and 1980s. In most countries, as new jobs were created, women moved into management as men moved up the hierarchy. In all countries, however, neither the political nor the legal changes were sufficiently powerful to counter resistance to women entering the most senior managerial levels. Recently, it was recognized that the earlier prediction of an anticipated "breakthrough" into the centres of organizational power seems to have been premature.[20]

45. This assessment led to the need to establish a distinction between entry into management and upward mobility within management, with their respective policy implications.

46. At the entry level into management, women's access to tertiary education and training as well as women's expanded career choices and access to employment are considered basic determinants of the supply of women managers. In this context, legal changes and public policies seeking to remove discrimination in education and employment play an important role. Moreover, affirmative action programmes have enabled organizations to recruit and hire women managers and to place them in managerial jobs, thus creating greater opportunities for upward mobility.

47. However, once in a career, women may encounter structural and behavioural barriers that restrict their vertical mobility. These barriers are a complex set of factors operating at various stages of career development. Whether in the public or the private sector, individuals often advance to top decision-making positions through career paths. The absence of women in top positions suggests that women's career paths are different from men's, or that, in trying to follow the same path, women encounter different or more severe obstacles, as discussed in section III below.

48. To understand the reality faced by women managers and the restrictions they face in their upward mobility to top decision-making positions, four interrelated and complementary perspectives have been developed.[20]

49. The first perspective suggests that individual differences between women and men could explain the paucity of women in management. The main recommendation is that women themselves must change to "fit in" by improving their skills, increase their self-confidence, become more strongly motivated to move up the career ladder, and exhibit more stereotypically male approaches to management. Women, on their own or stimulated by organizations, have increasingly turned to business schools, economics programmes and special management training courses to obtain the requisite qualifications for upward movement in management. Networking systems and mentoring programmes have been promoted in many cases to complete the set of actions initiated by women.

50. The second perspective focuses on organizations' and employers' responsibility for women's upward mobility. It states that not only women but organizations themselves need to change by eliminating barriers and providing incentives to increase the number of women managers and support their upward mobility. The main derived recommendation is that organizations should create career paths for women and men managers with an equal probability of leading to the top. Mechanisms such as affirmative action programmes have enabled organizations to hire women managers and to place them into higher positions, thus creating greater probability for upward mobility.

51. The third perspective stresses that discrimination is institutionalized and built into the organizational culture. In order to affect organizations, discrimination as a fact should be recognized by both women and men. Once recognized, the commitment of the overall organization, specially of senior managers, is required by a process of change in the basic assumptions about organizations. Based on this approach, measures such as mandated sessions to educate all managers - senior and junior - about the patterns of implicit and explicit discrimination and training in new non-discriminatory behaviours have been implemented.

52. The fourth perspective suggests that the interests of the organizations' most powerful members play a role in limiting women's access to top decision-making positions. Consequently, it is recommended stressing to senior executives the benefits of including more women executives and the costs of excluding them. This perspective emphasizes that it is important for women's upward mobility to convince organizations that women employees must be viewed as a competitive advantage instead of a legislated necessity. In some countries, organizations promoting equal opportunity for senior-level women - such as Catalyst in the United States of America and the Federation of Business and Professional Women in South Africa - provide firms with prestige incentives, such as awards, for advancing women into senior management.

53. Global competition and the need for top quality managers are making women's promotion into management a business issue, rather than strictly an issue of equality. For success, it is recognized that continued changes are needed at the individual level among both women and men, and at the organizational and societal levels.

C. Strategies to accelerate implementation

54. The Platform for Action assessed the rationale for increasing women's participation as economic decision makers. It stressed that women's contributions, concerns and needs should be incorporated in the definition of economic policies and structures because these play a determining role in women's relative status and power in society. Then, by being part of the decision makers, women will be able to express their interests, needs and concerns and make their contributions recognized.

55. In strategic objective F.5, the Platform for Action highlighted the need to eliminate occupational segregation and, in this regard, urged Governments, employers, employees, trade unions and women's organizations, to promote the equal participation of women in highly skilled jobs and senior management positions.

56. The Platform for Action, in the general context of women's access to decision-making, calls on, among others, Governments, the private sector, employers' organizations, subregional and regional bodies as well as international organizations to take positive action to build a critical mass of women leaders, executives and managers in strategic decision-making positions (para. 192 (a)).

57. Moreover, ILO recommends that policy makers seize the opportunities currently offered by the restructuring of employment that is taking place in many countries, to challenge the inefficiencies and inequities inherent in the gender segregation of the labour force, including occupational segregation.[21]

58. In order to accelerate the implementation of strategic objective F.5, specifically referring to occupational segregation and women's access to top managerial positions, the Commission might wish to consider the conclusions and recommendations of the 1996 Expert Group Meeting on Women and Economic Decision-making in International Financial Institutions and Transnational Corporations and suggest tangible measures for different actors to undertake on a priority basis.

59. The Expert Group Meeting concluded, inter alia, that:

(a) Women have made significant progress in terms of education, participation in economic activity and social status. However, they have a long way to go as far as advancement to top decision-making positions is concerned;

(b) There is ample evidence that increasing the representation of women in decision-making is good for business, not just for equality:

(i) For corporations, exclusion of women from decision-making translates into losses and costs: costs of staff turnover and loss of talent; loss of real and potential market share due to overlooking the needs of major consumer bases; and loss of shareholder value. It translates into loss of half the potential talent if companies are not seen by women as attractive employers;

(ii) For organizations, the need to rationalize shrinking resources and to have a lasting effect calls for new approaches. To develop these new approaches organizations need to include the most qualified staff - women and men - in decision-making; to increase the diversity of views; to better reflect the composition of the client population; and to demonstrate through their own staffing that they are committed to the advancement of women;

(c) The full and sustainable empowerment of women requires that a critical mass of women be represented at all levels in the decision-making process. This is essential to ensuring that institutional barriers to the advancement of women are eliminated and that a continuous pool of qualified women is available for future advancement. Critical mass, which is defined as at least one third representation, provides a support level that can mitigate perceived tokenism;

(d) It was suggested that transnational corporations appoint a critical mass of women to their boards; develop and adopt policies and practices to increase the level of recruitment; recognize the strategic dimension of human resources; develop specific, measurable, achievable and time-bound plans for promoting women to senior positions; appoint women to international assignments; ensure balanced representation of women and men on external advisory councils and regional boards; and develop best practices to enhance and support the development of women through organizations such as chambers of commerce, business and professional clubs and associations, boards of trade, and industry associations;

(e) It was recommended that international financial institutions adopt the goal of having a critical mass of women in decision-making and management throughout the institutions, including boards and staff positions; encourage Member States to establish a pool of and appoint qualified women to serve as board members and in management; include balanced staffing mixes to review the gender dimension of all programmes and projects; assess executing agencies for their ability to implement gender-sensitive projects; require senior managers to involve women in decision-making and to develop indicators and monitoring mechanisms; review conventional methods of recruitment and modify selection profiles; encourage women to move into management; develop practical interventions to address dual career issues for women and men; hold managers accountable for developing action plans and link this to performance evaluation and rewards; and encourage the growth of support systems, such as mentoring and coaching. The Meeting strongly stressed the need for commitment on the part of the presidents of these institutions, as well as on the part of human resources directors and managers;

(f) The role of Governments was considered a determining factor in achieving the goal of achieving a critical mass of women in economic decision-making positions. Governments were recommended to develop policies, programmes and practices to ensure gender balance at all levels of decision-making in the government, intergovernmental bodies, and regional and international financial institutions; create, develop, monitor and enforce employment policies in both the public and private sectors; incorporate provisions into bilateral treaties and other agreements that facilitate spousal employment in host countries; remove obstacles restrictive to the formation of women's non-governmental

organizations; establish or expand mechanisms that facilitate interaction between, and mobility among managers/executives in profit, non-profit and public sectors; and establish partnership with other actors;

(g) The United Nations system was recommended to take a lead in ensuring that a critical mass of women are represented in top levels of management in its own agencies and in Member States. It was proposed that United Nations agencies should support Governments, transnational corporations, international financial institutions and organizations in general in their efforts to promote women to top positions; encourage Member States to appoint more women to the boards and secretariats of United Nations bodies and to United Nations committees dealing with economic, financial and budgetary issues; and increase collaboration and exchange information;

(h) The Meeting considered that non-governmental organizations could act as both advocacy groups and catalysts for change. Non-governmental organizations were recommended to partner with transnational corporations, Governments, international financial institutions, other non-governmental organizations, and other actors; identify and recommend potential employees and board members; monitor and publicize best and/or worst practices; provide reward and recognition for transnational corporations, international financial institutions, Governments and other actors; report the progress to the Commission on the Status of Women; and improve their interventions in promoting women in economic decision-making through training, technical assistance and governmental support.

III. WOMEN IN POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

60. Under the critical area of concern "women in power and decision-making" (chapter IV.G), the Platform for Action affirms that women have the equal right to participate in governance and that the empowerment, autonomy and full citizenship of women are essential for their advancement in other spheres of life and for more transparent and accountable governance (para. 181). It further proposes numerous actions to be taken to achieve quickly a major breakthrough towards equality in power sharing and decision-making and gender balanced composition in all decision-making bodies at the national and international levels. Suggested measures include reform of electoral systems (para. 190 (d)), increase in women's participation and roles in political parties (para. 191), changes in recruitment and career development procedures in the civil service (paras. 192 and 195 (b)), and achievement of a "critical mass of women leaders" (para. 192 (a)).

61. The Platform for Action further emphasizes the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective for the achievement of these goals, stating that "women in politics and decision-making positions in Governments and legislative bodies contribute to redefining political priorities, placing new items on the political agenda that reflect and address women's gender-specific concerns, values and experiences, and providing new perspectives on mainstream political issues (para. 182).

62. Owing to the particularly gross under-representation of women in decision-making in the areas of peace, security and conflict resolution, the Platform for Action points to the need to "strengthen the role of women and ensure equal representation of women at all decision-making levels in national and international institutions which may make or influence policy with regard to matters related to peace-keeping, preventive diplomacy and related activities and in all stages of peace mediation and negotiations" (para. 144 (c)) and to "integrate a gender perspective in the resolution of armed or other conflicts" (para. 142 (b)).

A. Participation in political decision-making as a basic human right

63. The principle of equality between men and women in public life is affirmed by the Charter of the United Nations (Preamble; Article 8), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (General Assembly resolution 217 A (III)) and a number of other international treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to which 154 States are parties.

64. At the international level, women's right to equal participation in politics and Government has been advocated for the past 50 years by the Commission on the Status of Women. The Commission has called for equal participation of women and men in Government and the exercise by women of all rights of citizenship, irrespective of race, language or religion, including the right to vote, to be elected and to hold public office.[22]

65. Less prominent in the international discussion of women's role in decision-making has been their potential contribution to decision-making in areas such as peace, security and conflict resolution. Yet, women in particular have suffered as victims of wars and other conflicts and mass rape, and today constitute a majority of refugees. Their participation in preventive diplomacy or in resolving conflicts, however, continues to be extremely limited.

66. Moreover, despite long-standing recognition internationally of the fundamental right of women and men to participate in political life, and the recognition of this right in most national constitutions, in practice, the gap between the de jure and de facto equality of women in the area of decision-making remains wide. Whereas in almost all countries of the world, with the exception of two, women have the legal right to vote and to hold public office on an equal basis with men, in practice relatively few women have been elected to national legislatures, and even fewer occupy key decision-making positions, including in international organizations such as the United Nations.

1. Women in parliaments and in government decision-making

67. No major changes in data and trends related to the representation of women in parliaments and Governments have been identified since the Fourth World Conference on Women. Thus, the information on the topic contained in the Secretary-General's report on the participation of women in political life and

decision-making (E/CN.6/1995/12), submitted to the Commission at its thirty-ninth session, in 1995, is still relevant. There are, however, a few observations that can be made in this respect.

68. The downward trend in women's representation in parliaments continues. The results of recent Inter-Parliamentary Union studies indicate that the average number of women in parliaments, which had declined globally from 14.8 per cent in 1988 to 11.3 per cent in 1995, further decreased to 10.5 per cent in 1996.[23] The low number of women in parliaments indicates that despite decades of women's suffrage in most countries, women have not yet used their vote as a means of demanding an equal share of power and participation in political decision-making.

69. Regional and subregional trends also prevailed; for example, in Scandinavia in 1996 the record of women in parliament continued to be impressive, ranging from 33 per cent to 40.4 per cent. In a number of countries that gained full adult suffrage more recently, when the right to vote and participate in political life had become more widely accepted (Mozambique, the Seychelles and South Africa), women quickly achieved higher-than-average representation in parliaments, above 20 per cent.

70. In Eastern Europe, with recent moves toward democratization and the introduction of free elections and of multi-party systems, a sharp decline in the number of female parliamentarians over the previous record continued, although the figures have improved with each consecutive election. In some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, during the transition from one-party rule to multi-party systems, there was a decline in women in parliaments.[23]

71. Analysis by the Division for the Advancement of Women shows slow progress in women's representation in government decision-making positions at all levels globally (including minister, deputy minister, permanent secretary and head of department or the equivalent). Women made up only 6.8 per cent of cabinet ministers worldwide in 1996 and remained heavily concentrated in such areas as social affairs, education, health and women and the family. A significant improvement has been noted in Latin America and the Caribbean, where the rate of progress has accelerated to approach the levels of women's representation in the "Europe and others" region (i.e., Europe, Canada and the United States of America), which had traditionally led in almost all areas. In 1996, women in governmental decision-making at all levels in Latin America and the Caribbean reached 14 per cent, compared with 15 per cent in the "Europe and others" region. The positive change in the region should be further studied, as its experiences can be useful in other parts of the world.

72. Generally, however, it should be noted that there is an apparent glass ceiling for women in government administration and that women are concentrated in the more "social" ministries.

2. Women in multilateral diplomacy and international organizations

73. It appears that administrative restrictions and discriminatory practices that affect women more severely than men are even more prevalent in the diplomatic services than in other areas, at least in some countries.

74. Women are noticeably absent from decision-making in international organizations. In the United Nations, the percentage of women Professional staff reached 35 per cent in 1996.[24] The percentage of women at the senior managerial level (D-1 level and above) amounted to only 17.9 per cent in 1996. Their distribution, however, was uneven. For example, in 1996, the Department of Political Affairs had 22.2 per cent women at senior managerial levels, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 6.7 per cent, and the Department of Public Information, 28 per cent. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs had no women at the upper levels (D-1 and above). At the level of Assistant Secretary-General, the proportion of women declined from 14.3 per cent (four women) in 1986 to 6.7 per cent (one woman) in 1996, while at the level of Under-Secretary-General, the proportion of women increased from 0 per cent to 4.8 per cent (one woman).[25] Throughout the history of United Nations peacekeeping and electoral support there have been only two women in charge of United Nations missions. In 51 years, only two women have presided over the General Assembly.

75. Generally, it can be noted that little progress has been achieved in the past 50 years; that only a small number of women took an active part in political life; and that there is a high degree of social and political tolerance for such a situation.

B. Factors contributing to women's participation in the political process

76. The factors that contribute to greater numbers of women in public decision-making - whether through the national political process, that is the electoral process or political appointment, or through professional careers in the civil service - need to be further explored. Preliminary research by the Division for the Advancement of Women has indicated, however, that where the female electorate has emerged as a force to be reckoned with, the competition for votes has led many political parties to promote more women within their ranks and nominate them as candidates in order to secure women's votes and to include in their platforms issues which are particularly important to women. This has been done by, for example, the Social Democratic Parties of Austria, Germany, Poland and the Scandinavian countries. This strategy on the part of some parties has forced other parties to join in the competition for votes by placing women in more visible positions and by becoming more gender-sensitive.

77. Where women have demonstrated a clear preference for those parties and candidates that are gender-sensitive and supportive of women's interests, especially with regard to reproductive rights, social services, participation in decision-making, elimination of violence against women and environmental protection, close parliamentary or presidential contests have been influenced or the outcome determined by the female voters and their preferences. This has

occurred in such diverse countries and areas as Argentina, Austria, Germany, Poland, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Uganda, the United States of America and Scandinavia.

78. Women's participation in political decision-making is believed to be linked to such factors as women's education and female literacy; women's participation in the labour force; availability of childcare; women's health status; female entrepreneurship; strong women's organizations and movements; gender-sensitive legislation, and changes in the judicial system towards eradicating violence against women. It also tends to be higher in countries with a high level of legal literacy, where women's issues and concerns constitute part of public debate and where women's non-governmental organizations, advocacy groups and networks have been able to play a visible role.[26]

79. Special measures and policies aimed directly at accelerating de facto equality between men and women in decision-making have also promoted more women in political decision-making. They have been applied in some countries in order to ensure a certain percentage of women in political parties, parliaments and/or public boards. For example, in certain countries some leading political parties have established quotas for women, including in their governing bodies (Austria, Botswana, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Venezuela). Other countries, for example, Argentina and the United Republic of Tanzania, have implemented quotas reserving a minimum number of seats in parliaments for women. A similar practice is being legislated in India at all levels of government. In Bangladesh and India, special measures have been taken to introduce a female quota in local bodies. In the Nordic countries, quotas of 40 to 60 per cent for each sex are applied to all public boards and committees. The effectiveness of such measures differs from country to country and remains a subject of debate.

80. On the other hand, the number of women in political decision-making continues to be affected negatively by numerous obstacles, already identified in previous reports,[27] such as an unequal division of household duties; women's lack of economic independence or financial means; custom and tradition that define the public sphere as the male domain while relegating women to the private domestic sphere; prevailing negative attitudes towards women's political participation; a lack of confidence in and support for female candidates by the electorate, including women, and political parties; media stereotyping and more demanding criteria for women politicians than for men.

81. In pursuing civil service careers at both the national and international levels women are particularly affected by the prevalence of "closed" recruitment and promotion systems, often based on patronage or "old boys' networks", without clear requirements for entry or promotion and without transparency in the process; bias in job evaluation and classification; insufficient appeal mechanisms and a general absence of women from appeal bodies and selection, appointment and promotion panels; unequal opportunities for career and training development; the marginalization of women in some areas of the civil service traditionally considered as related to women and their systematic exclusion from others (e.g., foreign affairs, defence, the interior, central banks, economic affairs), or their relegation to positions to implement affirmative action policies rather than mainstream substantive issues.

82. Although most of these obstacles have been known for a long time, no adequate measures have been developed to address them efficiently.

C. Political decision-making and conflict resolution

83. The idea that women would make a difference in political decision-making and that societies and decision makers can take advantage of this difference needs to be further investigated. Not enough evidence seems as yet to be available to generalize about the particular contributions of women to political decision-making. The theory of a "critical mass" argues that women can make a difference in the political process if they achieve a "critical mass" of at least 30-35 per cent and act as a group.[28] The absence of a critical mass, of women from decision-making, it has been argued, deprives society of the "gender difference" in terms of the distinct issues, experiences, perspectives and approaches that women may bring to the process.

84. The recognition of the importance of gender differences and the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into political decision-making and conflict resolution processes was emphasized by the Expert Group Meeting on Political Decision-making and Conflict Resolution: The Impact of Gender Difference, organized jointly by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women and the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, in cooperation with the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, held in the Dominican Republic from 7 to 11 October 1996.[29]

85. The Meeting, which was attended by both mainstream experts in conflict resolution and feminist scholars and activists, provided an example of gender mainstreaming in practice. The conclusions reached despite differences of opinion and approach suggested that:

(a) Significant differences in women's and men's behaviour, attitudes, and styles result from different social constructions of female and male identities and roles and from different social positions;

(b) Bringing a gender perspective to bear on decision-making, including conflict resolution, means recognizing that women and men are differently involved in political processes. Much of politics and social research has been conducted in a way that is blind to gender difference, and this has meant that men and their male norms have been taken to represent the norm for all human beings. This has resulted in making women invisible as well as excluding them;

(c) Recognition of a gender perspective means fostering a better understanding of gender roles in specific contexts. As a broad range of research and experience indicates, women appear to have different definitions, for example, of peace and security, and different attitudes towards conflict resolution from those of men. Thus, a gender perspective might help to develop a fuller understanding of decision-making and conflict-resolution processes which could change the present conceptualization of political discourse and culture, redrafting political agendas and priorities and broadening the view of conflict resolution and politics generally.

86. The Expert Group Meeting concluded that applying a gender perspective might bring about, inter alia, the following changes: the present conception of politics might be altered; political discourse and the political culture might change; there might well be changes in the political agenda and in the way issues already on the political agenda are treated; the reaction to women politicians is likely to change, leading to less discrimination; there might be an increase in the participation of women in political decision-making, leading to the creation of women's new role models.

87. The Meeting stated that a gender perspective should be applied in all areas of public decision-making, including peace processes, responses to armed conflict, and training and capacity-building. The consistent application of a gender perspective would facilitate more rapid implementation of United Nations norms and principles, as well as encourage new, more participatory and inclusive ways of governance.

88. The Meeting reaffirmed the recommendation contained in paragraph 144 (c) of the Platform for Action to strengthen the role of women and ensure equal representation of women at all decision-making levels in national and international institutions which may make or influence policy with regard to matters related to peacekeeping, preventive diplomacy and related activities and in all stages of peace mediation and negotiations, taking note of the specific recommendations of the Secretary-General in his strategic plan of action for the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (1995-2000) (A/49/587, sect. IV).

89. Experts stressed that United Nations bodies should take into consideration the integrated follow-up to recommendations of the world conferences and summits of the 1990s, the link with conflict resolution, especially in terms of addressing violence, and promoting the mainstreaming of a gender perspective. The target of 50 per cent women in decision-making in the United Nations by the year 2000 should be pursued with concrete special measures.

90. The Meeting also built on the 1994 Expert Group Meeting on Gender and the Agenda for Peace, organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women, which concluded that those United Nations peace and security missions that had a greater gender balance in their mission staff appeared to have been particularly effective. Such missions were those to Namibia, in which 60 per cent of the Professional civilian staff were women, and South Africa, in which 53 per cent of the staff serving in civilian jobs during the first 16 months were women. It also pointed to some effects which have been observed when women form a critical mass in United Nations peacekeeping missions - so far largely in civilian jobs.[10]

D. Strategies to accelerate implementation

91. There remains in the post-Beijing period, an urgent need to promote gender-balance in decision-making in parliaments, government administration, diplomacy and international organizations and, perhaps more important, an awareness of gender issues and their consistent application to legislation and policy-making. Otherwise, gender equality will remain an elusive goal and humanity will be limited to male perspectives in its efforts for development. But the question

arises how best to ensure gender-balance in decision-making at all levels within the shortest possible time-frame.

92. The Platform for Action proposed a number of ways to increase women's role in power and decision-making. The Commission may wish to examine some of them:

(a) With regard to political parties, their structures and procedures, attention should be given to ways and means which are required to remove discriminatory practices; gender issues should be incorporated in political agendas and ensure women's access to leadership positions on an equal basis with men should be assured, as should their participation in appointive and electoral nominating processes;

(b) In terms of electoral systems, attention should be given to the impact of various types of electoral systems on women's representation. Suggestions for subsequent changes and reforms of electoral systems towards gender-balanced representation should be made;

(c) Efforts need to be made by all actors in Governments, the private sector, political parties and non-governmental organizations to review the criteria used in recruitment and appointment to advisory and decision-making bodies and promotion to senior positions and ensure that they do not discriminate against women. Recruitment and career development programmes should be restructured accordingly to ensure a gender-balanced composition of decision-making bodies and the transparency of criteria for recruitment and promotion;

(d) Comprehensive action to ensure a critical mass of women leaders in all areas and at all levels of decision-making should be undertaken by Governments, international organizations and civil society. The mechanisms to monitor women's access to decision-making positions should be created or strengthened;

(e) The existence of comprehensive databases disaggregated by sex is essential to demonstrating the extent to which women do or do not participate in government and in other political arenas. Therefore, further improvement of existing databases is essential for strengthening policies and programmes aimed at gender equality in decision-making;

(f) Commitment to the measures aimed at increased participation of women in decision-making between now and the year 2000 by countries where women's participation in public life is lagging could lead to a major shift in women's role. It would bring the voice of women more directly into the political process and in so doing, fulfil an important objective of the Platform for Action, empowering women to participate equally in power and decision-making.

93. The Commission may wish to reinforce these proposals and suggest concrete and tangible measures which would result in the gender-balanced distribution of decision-making positions between now and the year 2000.

IV. WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

94. The agreements reached in the past decade at the series of global conferences and summits organized by the United Nations have sought to frame the development challenges in an era of rapid social, economic and political change. Notably, results of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, have reflected an evolving understanding within the international community of the interlinkage between women, environment, population and sustainable development.

95. Agenda 21,[11] adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development recognized that women had a critical role to play in achieving sustainable development and put the issue of women and the environment on the world agenda. Chapter 24 of Agenda 21 (Global action for women towards sustainable and equitable development) called for "analysis of the structural linkages between gender relations, environment and development" (para. 24.8 (d)). However, by referring to women as a major group along with children, youth and indigenous people, chapter 24 implies that mainstream development is essentially a male domain.

96. This concept of women as a special group was superseded in Cairo and Beijing. In Cairo it was emphasized that there could be no sustainable development without the full participation of women in mainstream activities. The focus was on the importance of women's economic and political empowerment and on establishing a broadened approach to reproductive health and rights.

97. The Beijing Platform for Action reaffirmed the advances made in Cairo and also went beyond the traditional integration of women into the existing development agenda by emphasizing the need for a gender perspective at the outset in order to shape the development agenda. This commitment to a gender perspective has been since reiterated by, for example, the General Assembly in its resolutions 50/203 and 51/69.

98. The Platform for Action provided an extensive discussion of women and the environment in the context of sustainable development, examining women's role and contribution to conservation and management of natural resources and to safeguarding the environment, particularly at the local level. The Platform called for more participation of women at all levels of decision-making and advocacy in natural resources and environmental management, conservation, protection and rehabilitation. It emphasized that sustainable development would be "an elusive goal unless women's contribution to environmental management is recognized and supported". It called on Governments and other actors to "promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes, including, as appropriate, an analysis of the effects on women and men, respectively, before decisions are taken" (paras. 250-252).

99. Notably, as a result of recent global conferences, Governments have committed themselves to creating a new development paradigm that integrates environmental sustainability with gender equality and justice within and between generations (para. 248). However, an analysis of the 25 national plans for

action received by the Division for the Advancement of Women suggests that there are few with national strategies for carrying out the strategic objectives and actions on women and environment agreed at Beijing.

100. These findings were confirmed by the Expert Group Meeting on Women, Population and Sustainable Development: The Road from Rio, Cairo and Beijing, organized jointly by the Division for the Advancement of Women, the Division for Sustainable Development, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW),[32] which took place in the Dominican Republic from 18 to 22 November 1996. Experts noted that the link between women and environment as spelled out in the Platform for Action had yet to be translated into policies and programmes in most countries.

A. Women as actors in relation to environmental issues

101. One set of advocates in the developmental debate tended to focus on women as either victims or saviours of the environment. They emphasized the impact of environmental degradation on poor women, which is seen to increase women's burden of work, making it more difficult for them to gather fuel, find clean water and otherwise exploit natural resources for their subsistence and that of their families.

102. The implicit assumption is also that, because many of the world's women are consumers of primary resources, they are responsible for the depletion of these resources. At best, this approach places great responsibility on rural women in particular. Not only must they cope with managing scarce resources under difficult conditions of poverty, they must find a way of doing so while conserving these resources. At worst, this approach blames the poor, and poor women in particular, for environmental degradation. Notably, it is often the poorest households that are exposed to environmental risk as they manage resources. The poorer households tend to be rural dwellers, migrants from rural areas or female headed households.

103. Such an approach tends to focus on women, primarily in their reproductive roles, and the impact of an expanding population on the environment. This approach tends to hold women responsible for population growth which, in turn, is seen to be responsible for resource depletion and non-sustainability. By targeting women through family planning programmes, the proponents of this point of view see women as potential conservers of the environment should they reduce their fertility. Moreover, women are seen as nurturers with a natural affinity for nature and, therefore, are perceived to be a potentially powerful force for environmental protection. However, this assumption that there should be an emphasis on a special relation between women and nature has been refuted by another point of view.[33]

104. A growing recognition of the role of gender in relation to environmental issues has resulted in a more refined analysis of women's as well as men's roles. In that respect, the relationship between women and the environment should be seen within the overall system of gender relations, keeping in mind that gender refers to the socially constructed roles played by women and men

that are ascribed to them on the basis of their sex, and that gender roles are usually contingent on the social and economic context, and can both vary according to the specific context and change over time.[34]

105. The Platform for Action called for a gender analysis of how men and women interact with the environment and natural resources. It called for consideration of what the division of labour between women and men is, and what their roles and responsibilities are in this respect. Attention was drawn to the link between women's subordination in general and the obstacles they face in order to be effective managers of natural resources.

106. The Platform for Action called for Governments to "develop a strategy for change to eliminate all obstacles to women's full and equal participation in sustainable development and equal access to and control over resources" (para. 256 (g)). It stressed the importance of examining women's access to and control over resources, rights and ownership, capacity-building through education and training, reform of legal systems to recognize women's rights as human rights, and their participation in decision-making on environment and sustainable development.

107. The emphasis in the Platform for Action was on women's potential as environmental managers and actors in various domains of life: productive, reproductive, social, cultural and political. In this regard, the Expert Group Meeting emphasized that the responsibility for environmental damage that is assigned to women cannot be separated from the system of which they are a part. The main cause of forest depletion, for instance, can hardly be attributed only to women, though in many places they are responsible for gathering wood. The bulk of wood cutting is done by multinational or large enterprises responding to external market demands, or by local entrepreneurs responding to local market demands. Moreover, in some cultures men have taken the role of fetching wood after nearby forests have been cut down and distances and danger have increased.

108. The Platform also stated that the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment was the unsustainable pattern of overall consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries (para. 246). In other words, the patterns of consumption and production are important factors in understanding both the extent of ecological degradation as well as possibilities of sustaining development. Gender analysis might also provide better understanding of the patterns of consumption and production.

B. Global and local environmental issues: a gender perspective

109. Beijing reaffirmed the agreements achieved in Rio and Cairo by emphasizing that addressing the problem of deterioration of environment should include a systematic reflection of interlinkages between global and local issues of sustainable development with a gender perspective.

110. What is required fundamentally is a different perspective that integrates the micro and macro, bridges the public and private domains (especially the productive and reproductive spheres) and empowers different sectors of society,

including both women and men to be effective in environmental decision-making. A gender perspective is essential to establishing the cross-sectoral links as women play a mediating role in all spheres of society.

111. Global issues of sustainable development, including globalization of the economy, frequently manifest themselves at the local level. However, while some issues can be resolved at the local level, with social and economic costs and benefits accruing within the community or locality (for example, certain water and air pollution), some global issues can only be resolved at the macro level.

112. The sources or causes of many environmental problems experienced in both rural and urban areas originate from outside the boundaries of the household or community. Solutions therefore depend on external support. As a result of globalization, even in communities where women are having a positive impact on natural resource management and sustainability at the local level, this might be negated by global economic forces.

113. Results from case studies undertaken in Latin American peri-urban and rural communities as presented to the Expert Group Meeting[35] confirmed that while women are often the first line of defence in protecting the health and well-being of their families and communities, their ability to do so is often diminished by decisions made and environmental degradation that takes place outside their community or locality. In many situations, women may bear the brunt of the costs at the local level and are forced to work longer hours with fewer resources for lower rewards.

114. Women are often left to try to mitigate the cost of environmental degradation. Unfortunately, the magnitude of environmental problems exceeds their ability to mitigate the health and economic effects of environmental degradation, as does the lack of resources available to them.

115. Such situations also exist in much of the Africa region. There, despite the global environmental problems and impact of globalized economic systems, including structural adjustment programmes, the relationship of women to the environment as important producers, managers and consumers remains a visible constant, but is tempered by limits to access and control over resources, including land.

116. The conclusions reached at the Meeting suggested that sustainable development requires local level interventions in agriculture, fisheries, forest programmes and so forth, which are integrated and environmentally sensitive and take into account the needs and interests of both men and women. It also requires examination of macro level policies and programmes through a gender lens and introduction of the appropriate institutional mechanisms and regulations. This, in turn, implies a supportive political milieu which weighs the relative social, economic and environmental costs and benefits of development from a gender perspective. It also calls for a socio-political environment in which both men and women can have a voice to state their priorities and highlight the mechanisms for ending poverty, ecological degradation and stabilizing population.

C. Women as environmental decision makers

117. Women as well as men have a vested interest in sustainable development. Women's empowerment and increased role in decision-making are a necessary prerequisite for achieving sustainable development. The Platform for Action called for Governments at all levels to ensure opportunities for women, including indigenous women, to participate in environmental decision-making (para. 253). The participation of women in decision-making, it has been argued, alters the style of decision-making, particularly if there is a critical mass of women in a position to influence decisions.

118. It has been well-documented, in all regions of the world that at the local level, because of the way in which women's productive and reproductive roles link them to resources central to sustainable development, that their presence in decision-making does result in different decisions related to sustainable development.

119. At the local level, women who are empowered and in decision-making roles have generally had an important positive influence on the involvement of other women in decision-making processes. Women in decision-making, and the involvement of women in decision-making processes, is also related to women's sense of ownership of the processes and of the systems and resources that decisions will have an impact on. In that respect, the participation of women and their empowerment can bring positive changes in gender relations which will benefit society.

120. Women's empowerment is crucial for them to have the capacity to deal more effectively with the effects of environmental degradation. Economic and political empowerment of women, combined with the local knowledge of women about the environment, is a basic building-block for development policies which should be sustainable and empowering.

121. However, the focus on women's empowerment and participation in decision-making should not divert attention from the fact that the task of averting and managing environmental crises and of population stabilization should be a responsibility shared with men. Economic and political empowerment of women does not mean that they alone should take on the additional challenge of environmental protection.

D. Strategies to accelerate implementation

122. The Beijing Platform for Action highlighted three strategic objectives in the critical area of concern on women and the environment: involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels; integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development; strengthen or establish mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women.

123. To achieve these objectives, a wide range of actions have been outlined by the Expert Group Meeting and by others. As a result of Beijing, a new emphasis

has been placed on enabling women to be active decision makers, planners and designers of projects for sustainable development, particularly at the local level; improving access of women to skills through expansion of extension services and training in science, technology and economics and developing gender-sensitive databases and integrating traditional knowledge of women into resource management programmes.

124. The Platform for Action contributed to a better understanding of sustainability from a gender perceptive. It has also made a critical contribution to awareness-creation, on a worldwide basis, concerning the particular burdens placed on women in the environmental domain and of the important role which women can play. Women are correctly seen as valuable actors and partners in better environmental management.

125. In order to accelerate the implementation of the strategic objectives in the critical area of concern relating to women and the environment, the Commission might wish to consider the conclusions and recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting on Women, Population and Sustainable Development and suggest tangible measures for different actors to undertake on a priority basis.

126. The Expert Group Meeting concluded, inter alia, that:

(a) Women's environmental roles are to be considered in the context of their other roles or responsibilities in both the reproductive and productive spheres. In order to elaborate gender-sensitive policies, women should not be seen as one-dimensional - as the primary victims or primary conservers of the environment or as a homogenous group. Such factors as age, race and socio-economic status are equally significant and needed in policy analysis and programmes;

(b) The consideration of environmental issues should not be focused exclusively on women. Men and their roles are essential to a balanced analysis. Qualitative and quantitative indicators need to be developed and used in the measurements of the impacts of gender mainstreaming;

(c) Understanding the gender differences provides scope for identifying whether joint or targeted programmes and projects are necessary. Due to the existing inequalities and lower socio-economic status of women, the projects that target women should be continued, but they should go along with mainstream projects which take women's needs and interests into account;

(d) In line with recommendations and agreements made at the international level regarding the levels of financial and technical support necessary to achieve population stabilization and sustainable development in the context of individual human rights and the empowerment of women, Governments and international agencies should increase funding and reassign budget allocations for gender-sensitive population and sustainable development programmes;

(e) Development and cooperation agencies should ensure that all projects incorporate gender mainstreaming as an essential component. The allocations of resources for gender mainstreaming should be made from within budgets for population and sustainable development activities. Separate and earmarked funds

for women's programmes, where they exist, should not bear the burden of resource allocation for gender mainstreaming;

(f) The environmental problems require effective action at both the international and national levels, taking a gender perspective into account. A gender-sensitive connection should be made between macroeconomic and political processes: overconsumption of natural resources by the few in the North and poverty of the many in the South. The implications of the ongoing process of globalization should be considered through a gender lens;

(g) In policies and programmes related to sustainable development, particular attention should be given to understanding gender differences in local or global environmental impacts. Of equal importance is that the costs and benefits, including non-monetary measurements, of addressing environmental problems be disaggregated by gender and assessed at local and supra-local levels;

(h) Women should be able to exercise their rights and be involved in decision-making process at the local, national, regional and international levels. Their perspectives should be included in designing and implementing policies and programmes in the area of sustainable development;

(i) Given that the empowerment of women is an issue of human rights and is essential to achieving sustainable and equitable development, and given the critical role played by women's organizations in the move towards more sustainable development, the United Nations and other multilateral and bilateral donors should enhance their procedures for support to women's organizations, in all their diversity. In line with agreements reached in Rio, Cairo and Beijing, financial and in-kind assistance to women's organizations should be increased in all areas of empowerment, including support to local women to relieve their burden of multiple roles;

(j) The implementation of the Beijing recommendations should be undertaken along with the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, as well as of other agreements of United Nations conferences and summits, in an integrated way. The issue of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the area of sustainable development should be a focus of the review of the implementation of Agenda 21 to be carried out by the General Assembly at its special session in 1997;

(k) Before planning is undertaken and policy formulated, Governments should establish consultative mechanisms within all sectors of government in order to mainstream a gender perspective, promote equality and equity, and implement, in an integrated way, the recommendations of United Nations conferences;

(l) Training and education on issues of population and sustainable development should be provided to programmes and units within international institutions, national machineries and non-governmental organizations that work on gender;

(m) Advocacy campaigns based on valid and reliable research findings should be developed in order to help overcome resistance towards innovative gender mainstreaming in population and sustainable development policies and programmes.

Notes

[1] Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (A/CONF.177/20 and Add.1), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

[2] Report of the Secretary-General on the promotion of literacy, education and training, including technological skills (E/CN.6/1995/11), annex.

[3] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Compendium of Statistics on Illiteracy, 1995 edition, Statistical Reports and Studies, No. 35.

[4] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, World Education Report, 1995.

[5] World Bank, Vocational and Technical Education and Training, a World Bank Policy Paper (Washington, D.C., 1991).

[6] Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning of Women (EGM/VOCA/1996/1).

[7] World Bank, Toward Gender Equality: The Role of Public Policy (Washington, D.C., 1995).

[8] See, in particular, the World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs, adopted by the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990).

[9] International Labour Organization, Women Workers in a Changing Global Environment: Framework for Discussion (Geneva, International Labour Office, 1994).

[10] Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Women and Economic Decision-making in International Financial Institutions and Transnational Corporations (EDM/IFI-TNC/1996/1).

[11] International Labour Organization, 261st session of the Governing Body, "Changing role of women in the economy: employment and social issues" (GB.261/ESP/2/2), Geneva, 1994.

[12] The Wall Street Journal, 18 October 1996.

[13] Sunanta Siengthai, "Women and economic decision-making in international financial institutions and transnational corporations in Thailand", paper presented at the Expert Group Meeting on Women and Economic Decision-making in

International Financial Institutions and Transnational Corporations (EDM/IFI-TNC/1996/WP.3).

[11] Dawn Mokhobo, "Shattering the glass ceiling: the South African reality", paper presented at the Expert Group Meeting on Women and Economic Decision-making in International Financial Institutions and Transnational Corporations (EDM/IFI-TNC/1996/WP.4).

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[15] "Women and economic decision-making: experience of the United Nations", paper prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women for the Expert Group Meeting on Women and Economic Decision-making in International Financial Institutions and Transnational Corporations (EDM/IFI-TNC/1996/BP.1).

[16] Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Men and Women of the Corporation (New York, Basic Books, 1977); and Gary Powell, Women and Men in Management (Beverly Hills, California, Sage, 1988).

[17] Nancy Adler, Competitive Frontiers: Women Managers in a Global Economy (Blackwell, 1994).

[18] Lin Lean Lim, More and Better Jobs for Women: An Action Guide (Geneva, International Labour Office, 1996).

[19] See the terms of reference set out in the report of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/281/Rev.1).

[20] Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in Parliaments, 1945-1995: A World Statistical Survey, Series "Reports and Documents", No. 23 (Geneva, 1995) and Press Releases of 27 August 1995 and 20 October 1996.

[21] Report of the Secretary-General entitled "Human resources management: composition of the Secretariat" (A/51/421 and Corr.1), table E.

[22] Report of the Secretary-General on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/51/304 and Corr.1), table 3.

[23] See, inter alia, indicators used to construct the Human Development Index and the Gender-related Development Index, in United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report, 1996 (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996); and Women in Politics and Decision-Making in the Late

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[11] Report of the Secretary-General on equality in political participation and decision-making (E/CN.6/1990/2 and Corr.1).

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[13] "Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Political Decision-making and Conflict Resolution: The Impact of Gender Difference" (EGM/PDCR/1996/1).

[14] See Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Gender and the Agenda for Peace (GAP.1994/1); Report of the Secretary-General on the participation of women in political decision-making (E/CN.6/1995/12); and Division for the Advancement of Women, "The role of women in United Nations peacekeeping", Women 2000, No. 1 (December 1995).

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